

Project Panther LIFE: Best Practices for Teaching Independent Living Skills

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Program Overview

- *Project Panther LIFE* is a comprehensive postsecondary transition program that partners with Florida International University (FIU), Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), and Parent to Parent of Miami to provide *access* and *participation* for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) at the postsecondary level with an ultimate goal of *paid employment*.
- Students are provided with a system of support to ensure success in the program (e.g., academic mentors, faculty advisors, resident assistants, etc.)

Summer Residential Program (SRP)



Mission Statement:

To teach and foster the development of independent living skills in the community, further self-determination, and promote social skills.

Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDilg0WgR5M>

SRP Activities

SRP includes the following life skills activities:

- Planning and Cooking Meals
- Budgeting Money
- Conducting Household Maintenance
- Doing Laundry
- Learning Transportation Skills
- Working on Time Management
- Learning about Nutrition and Fitness
- Practicing Communication Skills
- Engaging with the Community
- Interpersonal Skills



SRP Curriculum

Curriculum contains three (3) main components:

Self-Determination

- Assertiveness
- Self-Advocacy

Independent Living Skills

- Budgeting
- Meal planning and preparation
- Household maintenance
- Laundry
- Nutrition and Fitness
- Hygiene and Grooming
- Time Management
- Transportation
- Apartment Safety
- Emergency Response
- Personal Safety

Social Skills

- Conflict Resolution
- Communication Skills
- Relationship Skills
- Stress and Anger Management
- Community Safety
- Leisure/Recreation

Independent Living Skills

Independent living skills can include:

- Grooming & Self-Care
- Engaging in Community Life
- Home Management
- Using Public Transportation
- Budgeting & Money Skills
- Clothing Maintenance & Laundry



Supporting Literature

- Independent living skills have been identified by scholars as critical to the success of students with intellectual disabilities (ID) (Alwell & Cobb, 2009; Bouck, 2004).
- Independent living skills and life skills contribute to successful transition into adult life and lead to positive postschool outcomes for students with ID (Bouck, 2010; Brolin & Loyd, 2004).

Purpose



The purpose of this study was to explore the development and generalization of independent living skills outcomes from a three-week summer residential program conducted by ***Project Panther LIFE*** at Florida International University.

Description of Participants

- 14 FIU *Panther LIFE* students ages 18-22
- 11 males; 3 females
- 4 Hispanic; 4 Black [Non-Hispanic]; 3 White; 2 Black Hispanic; 1 Other
- 1 had previously participated in an educational residential program
- 6 students in Year 1; 3 students in Year 2; 5 students in Year 3



- 11 students with English as home language; 3 students with Spanish as home language

Description of Resident Assistants (RAs)

- 6 FIU students ages 19-34
- 2 females; 4 males
- 3 seniors; 1 sophomore; 2 graduate level students
- 5 Hispanic (83%); 1 Asian (17%)
- All RAs were chosen through an application and interview process and received a stipend at the end of the SRP experience



Key RA Responsibilities

- Assist students with planning and preparing meals
- Model and teach household maintenance skills
- Assist with real life skills (i.e. budgeting money, grocery shopping)



- Plan activities on and off campus
- Model and promote social behaviors on and off campus

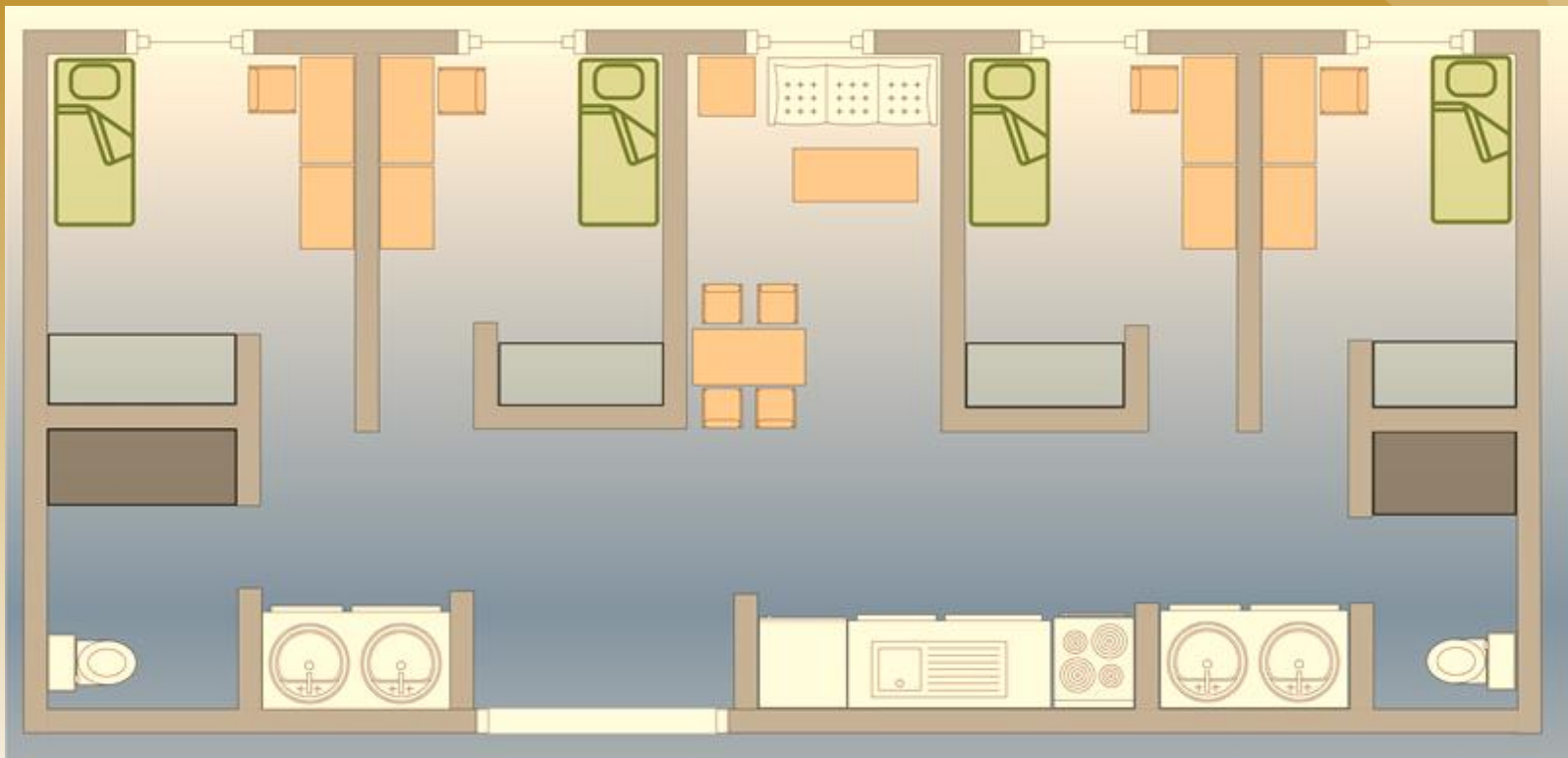
Description of Setting

- *Panther LIFE* students lived on campus for three (3) weeks (a total of 18 days)
- Students lived with up to two (2) other *Panther LIFE* students and one *Panther LIFE* RA



Description of Setting

Apartment style units in FIU University Towers



Data Collection: Instrument

- *Panther LIFE* RAs were given an online survey regarding his/her assigned *Panther LIFE* students' independent living skills
- The survey contained:
 - 16 dichotomous statements revolving around independence in 4 main areas:
 - Home Living (e.g., Student maintains healthy diet.)
 - Household & Money Management (e.g., Student sets up living setting.)
 - Transportation (e.g., Student organizes transportation.)
 - Community Involvement (e.g., Student locates community activities.)
 - 4 Likert-scale type questions regarding the student's overall independence level (e.g., Rate your student's level of independence at home)

Sample RA Online Survey

Household & Money Management

	Yes	No	N/A
Student creates and maintains checking and/or savings accounts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student manages money (i.e. counts money, makes correct change, independently keeps a budget, pays taxes or monthly bills).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student estimates cost of items or services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student sets up living setting (i.e. moves furniture, hangs pictures).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Transportation

	Yes	No	N/A
Student selects appropriate method of transportation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student possesses and uses required transportation documentation (i.e. bus pass).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student organizes transportation (i.e. calls STS, arranges rides with others).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student navigates throughout the community independently using preferred mode of transportation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Data Collection: Process

- The pre-test was administered at the end of the first week of the program.
- The post-test was administered immediately following the last day of the program.
- There were a total of 21 days in between pre and post test results.

Data Collection: Analysis

- Raw data was formulated using numbers of students reported as having mastered each of the skills on the survey.
- Data was plotted on comparison line graphs and examined for significant trends.
- The difference was found between pre-test and post-test data and examined for significant trends.

Results

Areas reported with significant increase in students' independent living skills

Managing Money
(35%)

Organizing
Transportation
(35%)

Selecting
Appropriate
Methods of
Transportation
(21%)

Navigating
Independently
(21%)

Locating & Using
Community Services
(21%)

Results (Con't)

Areas reported with significant decrease in students' independent living skills

Locating &
Participating in
Activities
(15%)

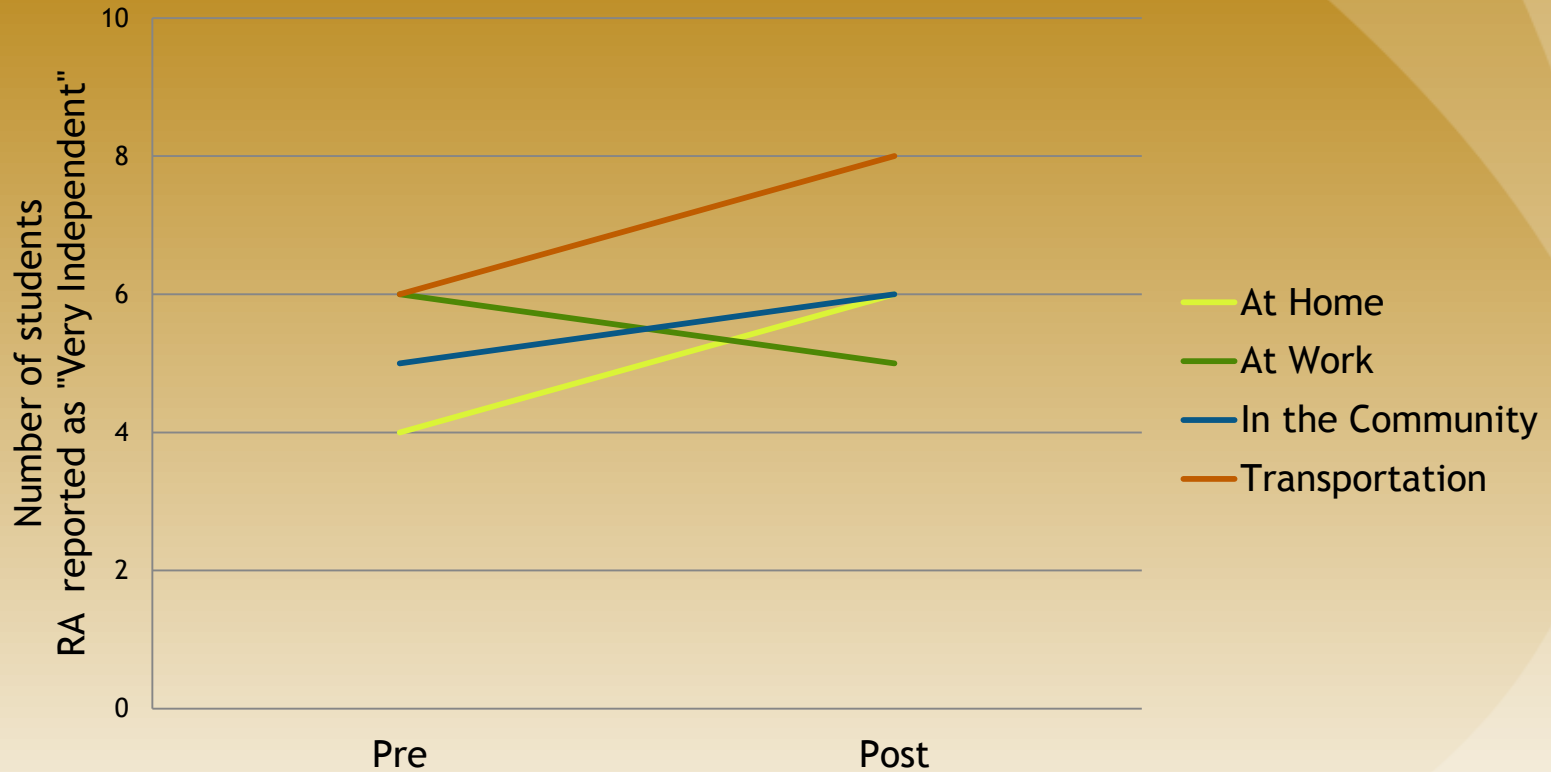
Setting up
Living Area
(15%)

Maintaining a
Healthy Diet
(15%)

Knowing
Disaster
Routines
(21%)

Results

Overall Independence



Data Collection: Focus Group

- RAs were debriefed in a focus group session a total of 3 times during the SRP.
- Focus group sessions were held at the end of each of the 3 weeks of the SRP.
- Focus group sessions were transcribed and then examined for trends in data.

Results: Focus Group

- **Trend 1: Improvement in independent living skills**
 - *“He seems to be more confident with his cooking. Today he made breakfast and this week he made soup.”*
 - *“He has shown much improvement with independent living skills. He gets up in the morning, makes his bed, and makes himself breakfast.”*
- **Trend 2: Students complete tasks with prompts**
 - *“She needs visual and verbal cues with cooking activities.”*
 - *“He still needs some prompting when taking initiative to do things around the apartment.”*
 - *“Sometimes he needs instructions repeated multiple times.”*

Results: Focus Group (Con't)

- **Trend 3: Resistance in changing routine**
 - *“The biggest thing she needs to work on right now is learning to cook new things.”*
 - *“My student doesn’t like to eat new foods. This week we are trying to get him to try spinach and eggs.”*
- **Trend 4: Difficulties with time management**
 - *“He needs a little more help and reminders. A chart of his day might make him more efficient.”*
 - *“[He] deviates and gets off task very easily. Video games are a major distraction.”*

Results: Focus Group (Con't)

- **Trend 5: Difficulties with money management**
 - *“Money and budgeting is a huge issues as he always tends to lose his receipts.”*
- **Trend 6: Improvement in social behaviors**
 - *“I saw her assert herself when she came and talked to me about how she felt about a difficult situation. That was a great improvement.”*
 - *“They learned how to live with others. They got frustrated, but I feel like they improved. They listened to each other and helped each other.”*

Discussion

- Participating in a comprehensive postsecondary education program contributes to positive growth in areas such as personal skill-building, independence, self-advocacy, and self-esteem.
 - Students with ID begin to see themselves as more similar to their peers without disabilities.
- For individuals with developmental disabilities, habilitative goals and the decision making process are determined by others (e.g., parents, teachers, or service providers) with minimal input from the individual with disability (e.g., Bannerman, Sheldon, Sherman, & Harchik, 1990).
 - *Oftentimes, young people with developmental disabilities watch as their sometimes younger siblings move out of the home, go away to college, live on their own, make their own decisions, and establish new relationships...while they remain under the roof and care of their parents or guardians relying on them for most if not all decisions (e.g., Adams, Nolte, & Schalansky, 2000).*
- The tendency to prolong childhood and to develop feelings of dependency toward parents are significant with this population (Larose & Boivin, 1998).

Discussion (Con't)

Maintaining independent living skills after SRP:

- Partnership with Wells Fargo to offer Money Management workshops
- Partnership between Parent to Parent and Center for Independent Living to better prepare parents to support their student during and after SRP experience
- Citizenship activities and club to better connect students with on and off campus activities
- Use of iPads for time management, organizational skills, and expense tracker

Next Steps

Future modifications to SRP:

- Lengthen program to 4 weeks
- Student application process
- Live-in RA supervisor
- Counseling & Psychological Services Support Group

Questions?

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