

# Needed: More solutions to help youth with physical disabilities find jobs



## What is this study about?

As teenagers become adults, finding a job delivers a sense of success and independence. They can view themselves as citizens earning paycheques and contributing to their communities.

Jobs are equally important for youth with physical disabilities caused by such conditions as cerebral palsy and spina bifida. Jobs bolster self-esteem, creativity, and a sense of responsibility – yet there is a difference between walking into a job interview and rolling into one in a wheelchair. Employers may balk at the special accommodations these youth will need, such as the prospect of buying new equipment and arranging accessible setups. These types of employer attitudes can make youth with disabilities hesitant to look for jobs.

To help combat such roadblocks, “vocational interventions” foster career development by helping youth explore their interests, develop new skills, advocate for themselves, and achieve employment.

### What are ‘vocational interventions’?

Any activities designed to help people find, get and keep a job. They include any activities that improve a workplace experience and enhance an individual’s career.



To uncover how vocational programs can be of most help to these youth, researchers first needed to understand what programs are already available and what is working well. They did a systematic review of studies that explored the value of such programs on groups where at least 50 per cent of the participants were youth with a physical disability.

### What is a ‘systematic review’?

A systematic review uses standard steps to collect, review and organize research findings to answer whether an intervention is effective.



## What did the study team find?

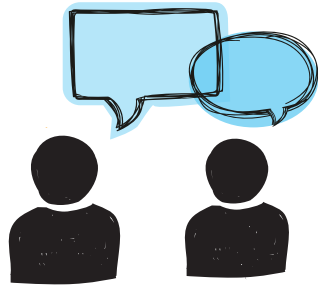
The key finding: an absence of findings. Only eight studies met the criteria, and they were almost all of poor quality. This small number reflects a major gap in research – and suggests a gap in the availability of these programs. While some evidence shows that vocational programs can improve employment outcomes for these youth, more research is acutely needed.

In the eight studies, the most common types of support were:

- mentorship
- one-on-one coaching
- job placements
- networking with possible employers and family involvement.

One notable study paired youth with mentors who were employed and had a similar disability, whose firsthand experience helped youth better understand how to advocate for themselves.

The main takeaway: the research community must do more to generate data in this area, aim to show how this issue can be tackled, and to suggest the best paths toward solutions.



### From a caregiver who read this study

“I have a dream that my son will find meaningful work. Clearly, vocational programs can help young adults with disabilities navigate this important step in their lives. I hope researchers will continue to develop their understanding of what makes a vocational program most effective.”

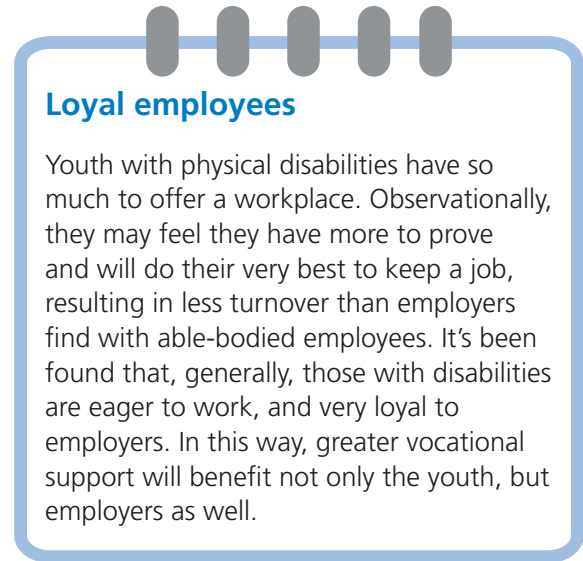
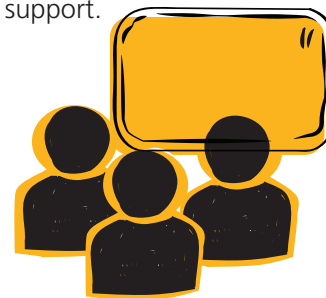


## What this means for caregivers

The systematic review highlighted that family involvement was a common part of successful vocational programs. Parents and/or caregivers (refers to parents and others caring for the child) were encouraged to participate in educational sessions and workshops, to help them learn about what vocational services are available, and how to best support their children in finding a job.

In the review, six of eight studies showed that vocational programs did indeed lead to paid or unpaid employment for most participants – often entry-level jobs, common to this age group. Based on the findings, caregivers may wish to find specific programs that teach youth new strategies to find a suitable job, how to effectively participate in job interviews, and advocate for workplace adaptations.

And in five of eight reviews, youth participants were more positive about their future job opportunities. Some vocational programs included caregivers, and results showed that they also developed a more positive perception of their child’s ability to land a job with some support.



### Loyal employees

Youth with physical disabilities have so much to offer a workplace. Observationally, they may feel they have more to prove and will do their very best to keep a job, resulting in less turnover than employers find with able-bodied employees. It’s been found that, generally, those with disabilities are eager to work, and very loyal to employers. In this way, greater vocational support will benefit not only the youth, but employers as well.

### For more information

Find the [abstract here](#) or visit your local library:

Hanif, S., Peters, H., McDougall, C., & Lindsay, S. (2017). A Systematic Review of Vocational Interventions for Youth with Physical Disabilities, in Barbara M. Altman (ed.) *Factors in Studying Employment for Persons with Disability (Research in Social Science and Disability, Volume 10)* Emerald Publishing Limited, pp.181 - 202

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