

CAREER TRANSITION PROGRAMME: CHALLENGES FACED BY PARENTS WITH AUTISTIC CHILD

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Abstract: *The working environment is an environment that will be faced by every individual after completing education or when going through adulthood. No exception also to individuals with special needs. This study investigated the challenges faced by parents with autistic kid. It also aimed to find out the implementation and perception towards transition programme. The sample involved in this case study is parents who send their child to pursue a career transition program. Data were collected through semi-structured interview with the parents. It was found that the parents are actively involved in the programme working hand in hand with the researcher. They gave full cooperation and were positive throughout the transition programme. They wished that their child can continue with the programme to help prepare him for the real working environment.*

Keywords: *Transition Programme, parents, autism*

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge and skills for life is very important to every individual. Parents are indeed expecting their children to master the skills to be independent adults especially for children with special needs. If these special needs individuals not trained adequately and given the opportunity to work, then it will be very difficult for them to get chances of contributing to society and the nation

Based on the principles contained in the Philosophy of Education, the education was with the purpose of providing individual with special needs to be skilful, independent, directional and capable of adapting themselves in the society. These skills need to be learned in school, especially in the integration special education program where it needs to be taught to learning difficulties students. During middle school, students are taught life skills subjects together with vocational training (on job training) to equip these students as adults (Cronin Patton 1993).

The main goal of special education is to teach skills that can prepare students to transition from schooling to life in the community. Success in life as adults are much influenced by the quality of education and training received while in school (Goupil, Tasse, Garcin Dore, 2002). In Malaysia, special education has to do with the concept of a caring society which aims to provide opportunities to individuals' special needs integrated with members of the communities to build positive attitudes towards individuals with special

needs and ensure they get job opportunities and guarantee quality of life (Sally et al. 2001). The focus of this study is to identify perceptions, preparations and the challenges faced by parents during the implementation of the transition programme for career individual special needs.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In general, learning disability students faced academic problems such as reading, writing, language development, comprehension, interpersonal relationships, intrapersonal relationships and behaviour. Thus, it is natural given their proficiency in the field of vocational as it is in accordance with their ability and development. Career transition program gives opportunities for them to acquire the much needed skills when they finished school. This is aimed at allowing them being independent, getting ready in work environment to meet the needs of themselves and their responsibilities towards the family and the community around them (Molloy 1972).

In Malaysia, there is no career transition services and support team in secondary schools. Most of the responsibilities in transition program held by special education teachers involved in the program. Therefore, all planning and application are based on the initiative of the teachers themselves (Aliza Alias, 2013). For parents, the transition is an on-going process in the planning, implementation, evaluation and balancing the life of the whole family.

Parents are vital to the lives of individual with special needs and they are responsible to gather information about services available. The current service delivery model has placed family's role in setting the services available for their children, and teachers realize that they need to provide support to parents so that individuals with special needs get to successfully take part in the process of a complex transition (Caldwell, 2006; Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy Weiss, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative and descriptive study or better known as case study. Creswell (2005) explains that case study was "a profound exploration of the system...based on extensive data collection" (p. 439). Roberts (2004) also supports the use of case studies to give focus to the "experience of a person based on their perspectives...and the organisational processes" (p. 111).

The sample of this study is a mother who sent child to a transition program. Data collection is done using semi structured interview.

Research Findings and Discussion

The findings in this study will focus on 3 main aspects such as perception, preparation and the challenges faced by parents. Each one is analysed in detail to see the issues arising during the implementation of career transition.

Respondent Demographic

This case study examines the information gathered from a single respondent, namely a mother of a special needs child. Mrs N was a 44 year old mother. She got married in 1994 and has two children. Mrs N is a lecturer at a University in Selangor. She received her PhD from a University in Ireland in the field of computer science. Her second child, Amri (not real name) has been diagnosed with autism. Amri is currently attending a centre for special needs individuals in a University.

Child's Background

Amri is a 16 years old teenager. According to Puan N, Amri was born normal and had a typical development until the age of 2. He later got a diagnosis from child development experts in a hospital in Northern Ireland, Belfast.

After he was born ... until almost 2 years... I can say that he developed normally. Then, I noticed something different when he talk... he had roughly 20 words. After that, they got less and less. I forced my concern to the doctor. From that moment he started getting his diagnosis. We went to see speech therapist and child specialist and from there, it's confirmed that Amri is autistic.

The changes in Amri after age 2 worries Mrs. N and made her wonder why it happens. Mrs N did not know the cause of the changes that later led to uncertain possibilities.

Nothing weird happened then. Just maybe while I was pregnant...it happened to haze badly. Not sure if it was the effect of haze... or at another time, I remembered while he was still a baby...people from the health ministry done some fogging at home. The house was filled with the smell of chemical fog ... but I'm not sure. I asked for a help from a professor in the UK to examine my son's condition, and sent urine samples too. Then the doctor traced some sort of gluten or what so ever...

Child's Education

After getting a diagnosis from child specialists, Amri get early intervention with the cooperation of multidisciplinary team.

Amri was placed in a nursery for special needs. There ... I think there were not just for autistic children. He was about 4 years at that time. Before entering the nursery he attended therapy session. Almost like every week there were a variety of activities. Speech therapy, occupational therapy, physio and so on ... and I went to workshop for parents and I also learnt sign language when he was not very verbal. I learn sign language to assist in communication with him.

Mrs N have stated that Amri get early intervention at home and some therapy that she did on her own at home which she must report on each session. Each month, an officer will come to the house to check the progress of therapy sessions that Mrs N run.

Early education in the United Kingdom began at the age of 5 years. At the age of 4 years and a half, Amri has been initially sent to the best special education

school that provides a lot of help for special education needs students in Northern Ireland, Belfast. Mrs N had to return to Malaysia after she completed her study when Amri was 5 years old plus. She felt reluctant to return because of the good services Amri received in Ireland. However, she could not do anything because she was bound by the University contract. After returning to Malaysia, Amri often change schools and special education centers. The most recent, at the age of 16 years old, Amri is learning at an Autism Centre in the same University where she works. Amri has been participating in the career transition program run by a Special Education graduate student for 3 weeks.

Career Transition Program

The first question posed to Puan N is about what she thinks about Amri's participation in a career transition program.

I actually never thought about it at all. It never cross my mind to send him for work. At this age ... Despite being 16 years of age... but we still think he sorts of a little boy ... or like a baby. Sometimes it worries me ... can can he do it? He never done anything at home...

Mrs N had positive perception even though she was a little worried in the beginning.

Of course I was a bit worried in the beginning. Worry... because I'm not sure if Amri can cope not... adapt himself with everything. That's all. But I want him to... let him try lah. To me if we don't push him to try, we will lose the opportunity to see his potential.

Talk about confidence, Mrs N has indicated that she has little confidence that Amri will be able to go through the program well. This is because she was briefed about the preparation and career transition program. In addition, Mrs N also did some preparation to support the program.

I didn't ask him to mop the floor at home ... reason because it's difficult physically. Indeed I rely on the centre. I just help prepare him mentally ... I keep telling him that you are going to work... you need to mop the floor... then he will get the reward... play futsal. The reason is because he likes futsal. So when he has been prepared mentally, so easy lah.

Mrs N also helped to get Amri ready before the programme starts by printing 'social story' provided by the teacher and then tells Amri what will happen along the program.

Amri showed positive reaction and he seemed excited whenever Mrs N mentions about going to work. Mrs N is sure that among the main causes of Amri's positive reaction is because he loves to play futsal.

The reason is he loves to play futsal...so I guess it is one of the main factors why Amri so excited every time I mention about work ... because he knows he can play futsal afterwards. If he needs to work in open space ... it may be quite difficult.

During the Career Transition Program

Speaking about problem, Mrs N stated that there were no big issues except for the arrangements and programme schedule that needed to be adjusted due to the absence of the teacher.

Everything went well... it's just that when he is ready, the date change. But I understand...when he's looking forward, he has set his mind, ok today I'm going to work...He will ask. So... I had to tell him. Sorry ... teacher M is not available today. After that he needed to reset his mind...its okay. Other than that...he will mumble a little.

However, Mrs N thinks that this is a good experience for Amri as he can learn that not all planning go as we intended to. Sometimes there are plans that need to be changed according to the current state and Amri should learn to adapt himself with the situation in the future. During the career transition program, Amri managed to adapt very well.

He's okay and didn't show any signs of stress or what so ever. If he feels stress it can be seen...He will make noise what so ever lah. If he doesn't like it, like going to the clinic, or see the doctor...he will show attitudes. Fear of injection, and many other reasons for not going. This one nothing, he's okay. He likes lah...always mention teacher M futsal... teacher M futsal...

From the aspect of Amri's personal change, Mrs N stated that there was no huge difference to Amri because he did not do the work at home.

Maybe because I personally didn't follow up with the program. Maybe I should get him to mop the floor. So I can't comment more. Just God willing I will try to apply. If possible he can apply the skills that he learnt here at home. That's actually my wish too so that he can do something at home... start with this career transition program... God willing ... the needs to motivate herself ... all family members...father, mother, Amri... everybody plays their role lah.

Mrs N is determined to perform the skills that he learnt at home with more rigorous planning in the future. This will be done after Amri's experience in the career transition program. Mrs N could also anticipate what will be the issues and solution.

During this programme Amri, Mrs N face little problem arranging Amri's time as he usually wakes up quite late and sometimes late to school. It was quite difficult to train Amri in the beginning. However, she managed to train Amri so that they can reach the centre exactly 2.00 pm. And then Amri will go for work with his teacher.

My problem is just to keep the time with him. He usual wakes up late, so I have to remind him many times to reach the centre by 2 o'clock. So he needs prepare in advance at home. So now he understands that he needs to wake up and get ready a little bit early...so that he can reach here by 2 o'clock.

The success of the program is not based on how clean the floor that Amri mops, but rather to the acceptance and exposure to the world of work.

He's comfortable with it and he wants it. He keeps on asking for it...even after the program ended, he still wants to go.

Mrs N also shared her feelings with respect to this program.

Alhamdulillah I am grateful actually...teacher M is willing to go with Amri ...to train Amri. So Praise God it's a very good programme for him.

Mrs N also stated that she would like Amri to be involved with such program in the future. In addition, Mrs N also to suggest improvements in

the planning stage where she wanted to be involved directly in this career transition program.

Finally, Mrs N shared her hope for Amri's success in working world.

If he is capable of ... I wish him to work lah. After his session at the centre. When I observe him at home, I can feel that he's bored. Nothing to look forward. There's nothing...no friends, no one to interact. Although he may not interact directly but he wants some attention and friends. When he works he has the goal in life. He wake up in the morning, he goes to work and then get some reward what so ever. And more in order lah. InshaAllah with proper training, he can do it...God willing. We don't know until when right...we get to stay in this world.

CONCLUSION

The results show that the career transition program for individual with special needs have been planned and carried out smoothly although there are challenges such as time management and applications of work skills at home. However, this experience gives good effect to parents when they become more confident of making early preparations if their child is included in the program of career transition in the future. Through this study, I can conclude the career transitions program is capable of giving a new perspective to parents and lead them to expand their child's potential for a more secure future.

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