

## Executive Summary

At various times in history, changes in economic and social conditions have generated a reconsideration of how best to characterize the life stages through which most individuals in a society progress. Increasingly, researchers contend that changes in the latter part of the 20th century and the early 21st century have brought us to another such time of reconsideration (e.g., Fussell and Furstenberg 2005). They suggest that, among other social shifts, an increasing emphasis on postsecondary education and the growing struggles postadolescents face in becoming economically self-sufficient elongate or postpone the transitions usually associated with adulthood—“completion of schooling, movement from the parental household, entrance into the labor force, formation of partnerships, and the onset of childbearing and parenting” (Furstenberg, Rumbaut, and Settersten 2005, p. 7). Recognizing this reality, a growing body of research focuses on the period of “early adulthood” as distinct from adolescence and full adulthood (e.g., Arnett 2002; 2001).

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), funded by the National Center for Special Education Research at the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, provides a unique source of information to help in developing an understanding of the experiences of secondary school students with disabilities nationally as they go through their early adult years. NLTS2 is a 10-year-long study of the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of a nationally representative sample of youth with disabilities who were 13 to 16 years old and receiving special education services in grade 7 or above, under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the 2000–01 school year. NLTS2 findings generalize to youth with disabilities nationally and to youth in each of the 12 federal special education disability categories in use for students in the NLTS2 age range. The study is designed to collect data on sample members from multiple sources in five waves, beginning in 2001 and ending in 2009.

Much of the information reported in this document comes from youth with disabilities themselves in the form of responses to either a telephone interview or a self-administered mail survey with a subset of key items from the telephone interview<sup>1</sup> conducted in 2005, as part of NLTS2’s third wave of what will eventually be five waves of data collection, referred to as Wave 3. Data for youth who were reported by parents to be unable to respond to an interview or complete a questionnaire or who did not respond to interview or survey attempts were provided by parents. Data from the three sources were combined for the analyses reported here and subsetted to include only data for out-of-high school youth. In constructing variables that describe youth’s experiences since leaving high school, data from the Wave 2 youth telephone interview and mail survey or the Wave 2 parent telephone interview (conducted in 2003) also were used for youth who were out of high school at that time. When similar data are available, comparisons are made between youth with disabilities and the same-age youth in the general population. General population comparison data were taken from The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 (NLSY97), 2001 data collection, and from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Wave 3. Both sets of general population data were

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<sup>1</sup> Only a subset of items was included in the mail survey because the full set of items was considered too lengthy to be feasible for a mail questionnaire format.

collected in 2001 and comparison analyses of these weighted data include a subset of respondents who were out of high school at the time and were 17 to 21 years old in NLSY97 or 18 to 21 years old in Add Health.<sup>2</sup>

This report focuses on the subset of youth with disabilities who were out of secondary school and 17 to 21 years old when telephone interviews were conducted with their parents and, whenever possible, with youth themselves in 2005. Youth included in this report varied in the length of time they were out of high school, ranging from less than 1 month to 4 years post-high school. NLTS2 findings reported in this document use information collected from these youth or parents to describe the experiences of youth with disabilities in the postsecondary education, employment, independence, and social domains in their first 4 years out of high school. Findings are presented for youth with disabilities as a whole and for those who differ in disability category, length of time out of high school, high school completion status, age, gender, parent's household income, and race/ethnicity.

This report is organized to provide information on out-of-high school youth with disabilities in several key domains, including the following:

- Postsecondary education enrollment and educational experiences, such as major field of study and support services received.
- Employment status and characteristics of youth's current or most recent job.
- Productive engagement in school, work, or preparation for work.
- Residential independence; the prevalence of marriage, parenting, and sexual behavior; and aspects of their financial independence.
- Social and community involvement, including friendship activities and community participation in both positive and negative ways.

This executive summary presents all findings related to these key domains that are included in the full report for out-of-high school youth with disabilities as a group as well as all differences between youth who differ in their high-school leaving and demographic characteristics that are significantly different at at least the  $p < .01$  level. Patterns of significant differences between disability categories are noted and illustrated by specific examples of significant findings.

## **Postsecondary Education**

As the American economy becomes progressively more knowledge based, attaining a postsecondary education becomes more critical (Carnevale and Desrochers 2003). NLTS2 provides the opportunity to examine the postsecondary education experiences of youth with disabilities who have been out of secondary school up to 4 years, including both those who completed high school (those who graduated, received a certificate of attendance or completion, or who passed a high school exit exam or completed a GED program) and those who did not (dropped out or were permanently suspended or expelled).

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<sup>2</sup> Youth with disabilities are included in the general population comparison sample because excluding them would require using self-reported disability data, which frequently are not an accurate indicator of disability, resulting in both over- and underestimations of disability.

- Forty-five percent of youth with disabilities reported having continued on to postsecondary education within 4 years of leaving high school.
- Youth with disabilities were reported to be more likely to have enrolled in 2-year or community colleges (32 percent) than in vocational, business, or technical schools (23 percent) or 4-year colleges or universities (14 percent), and of those options, were least likely to have enrolled in 4-year colleges.
- On average, students with disabilities who continued on to postsecondary school did so within 5 months of leaving high school. Students enrolled in 4-year colleges sooner after high school than they did in postsecondary vocational, business, or technical schools (3 months vs. 7 months).
- Most students with disabilities were enrolled in postsecondary education programs on a consistent (86 percent), full-time (71 percent) basis.
- Postsecondary students who attended 2-year colleges were more likely to have been enrolled in an academic than vocational course of study (57 percent vs. 29 percent). Students at all types of colleges focused on a broad range of majors.
- To receive accommodations or supports from a postsecondary school because of a disability, students first must disclose a disability to their school. Fifty-five percent of postsecondary students who were identified by their secondary schools as having a disability did not consider themselves to have a disability by the time they transitioned to postsecondary school. Thirty-seven percent of postsecondary students with disabilities identified themselves as having a disability and informed their postsecondary schools of their disability.
- Twenty-four percent of postsecondary students who were identified as having a disability by their secondary schools were reported to receive accommodations or supports from their postsecondary schools because of their disability. In contrast, when these postsecondary students were in high school, 84 percent received some type of accommodation or support because of a disability.
- Postsecondary students who were given assistance because of their disability received a range of accommodations and supports from their schools. Additional time to complete tests was the most frequently received type of assistance, with 68 percent receiving this type of accommodation.
- Postsecondary students received help with their schoolwork beyond the support provided by schools because of their disability. Forty-four percent reported receiving some type of help, whether or not the assistance was related to their disability.
- Most students who received any type of help with their schoolwork reported that these supports were “very” or “somewhat” useful (90 percent) and that they “probably” or “definitely” (86 percent) were getting enough assistance.
- Eighty-nine percent of students with disabilities who were currently enrolled in postsecondary school reported that they were working toward a diploma or certificate. A total of 29 percent had graduated or completed their programs by the time they left their postsecondary schools.

## Employment

Many adults consider employment a central component of their lives (Levinson and Palmer 2005). Employment has been linked to a range of positive outcomes, including economic independence and enhanced self-esteem (Fabian 1992; Lehman et al. 2002; Polak and Warner 1996).

- Working for pay outside the home was an aspect of the early post-high school experiences of a majority of youth with disabilities. Seventy-two percent of youth with disabilities out of high school up to 4 years reported having been employed at some time since leaving high school, holding an average of two or three jobs.
- Among youth with disabilities who had been out of high school 1 to 4 years, 58 percent worked full time at their current or most recent job.
- Wages of working youth averaged \$8.20 per hour in 2005, and 44 percent received at least one of the benefits investigated in NLTS2 (paid vacation or sick leave, health insurance, or retirement benefits).
- Youth working full time (35 hours or more per week) were more likely to earn more than \$9.00 per hour than youth working part time (35 percent vs. 15 percent). Youth working full time were more likely to receive paid vacation or sick leave and health insurance (43 percent and 40 percent, respectively) than those working part time (21 percent and 15 percent, respectively).
- About 19 percent of working youth reportedly had employers who were aware of their disability, and 3 percent reported receiving some kind of accommodation on the job, most often adaptations to assignments or supervisory arrangements.
- Approximately 85 percent of working youth reported that they liked their job at least fairly well and 87 percent reported being treated pretty well by others at their job. Approximately 67 percent to 78 percent agreed that their job paid pretty well, offered opportunities for advancement, put their education and training to good use, and, among those employed 6 months or more, had thus far involved a raise or promotion.
- Despite positive feelings about their jobs, out-of-high school youth with disabilities were more likely to have quit their last job (53 percent) than to have left for other reasons.

## Productive Engagement in the Community

NLTS2 considered youth with disabilities as being productively engaged in the community if they had participated in employment, education, and/or job training activities since leaving secondary school. Addressing this broader concept of engagement, rather than considering individual outcomes (employment or postsecondary education) separately, was encouraged by the advisory panel during the design of the initial NLTS; as a result, NLTS was one of the first studies to present a broader perspective on how youth and young adults with disabilities could be productively engaged in their communities. The advisory panel for the current study continued to endorse that view of engagement. The importance of this broader view of what constitutes a successful transition is now incorporated in the current federal policy that requires states to collect data on “Indicator 14”—i.e., “the percent of youth who had IEPs, are no longer in secondary school, and who have been competitively employed, enrolled in some type of postsecondary school, or both, within one year of leaving high school” (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B)). The NLTS2 operationalization of this concept, as endorsed by the NLTS2 design

advisory panel, is somewhat broader than Indicator 14, in that NLTS2 includes all forms of employment, not just competitive employment, and includes job training as a productive form of preparation for work, in addition to enrollment in postsecondary education.

- Eighty-five percent of youth with disabilities who had been out of secondary school up to 4 years were reported to have been engaged in employment, postsecondary education, and/or job training during this post-high school period.
- Thirty-six percent had paid employment as their only mode of engagement.
- Thirty-one percent had been employed since leaving high school and also had been enrolled in postsecondary education.
- Nine percent had been employed and also involved in other activities, including job training.
- Postsecondary education was the only mode of engagement since high school for 6 percent of those with disabilities.

### **Household Circumstances of Out-of-High School Youth With Disabilities**

Markers on the path to adult life typically have included financial and residential independence and self-sufficiency, marriage, relationships, and parenting (Hogan and Astone 1986; Modell 1989; Rindfuss 1991).

- Within the first few years of leaving high school, 25 percent of youth with disabilities had lived independently (on their own or with a spouse, partner, or roommate), and 6 percent had lived semi-independently (primarily in a college dormitory or military housing).
- When youth were asked about their satisfaction with their current living arrangement, 58 percent reported being satisfied with their residential arrangement. Those who lived independently or semi-independently were more than twice as likely to be satisfied with their residential arrangement as those who lived with their parents (45 percent vs. 17 percent).
- Seventy-three percent of youth with disabilities who were age 18 or older reported ever having had sexual intercourse.
- Of those who had ever had sexual intercourse, 70 percent reported that they or their partner used a condom the last time they had intercourse, and 87 percent reported having used any contraception.
- Eleven percent of youth with disabilities reported having had or fathered a child by the time they had been out of high school for up to 4 years. Seven percent of males reported having fathered a child and 18 percent of females reported having had a child.
- Ten percent of youth with disabilities were married or living in a marriage-like relationship.
- Fifty-six percent of youth with disabilities had a savings account, 46 percent had a checking account, and 28 percent had a credit card in their own name. Eighty-nine percent had annual individual incomes (or for those living with a spouse, household incomes) of \$25,000 or less.

## **Social and Community Involvement of Out-of-High School Youth With Disabilities**

Living successfully in their communities has long been considered central to youth with disabilities' quality of life (Halpern 1985). An important aspect of whether a youth is living successfully in the community is the “adequacy of his or her social and interpersonal network [which]...is possibly the most important of all” aspects of adjustment for young adults with disabilities (Halpern 1985, p. 480).

- NLTS2 findings suggest that youth with disabilities had active friendships—87 percent reported seeing friends outside of organized activities at least weekly.
- Forty-eight percent were reported to communicate by computer at least once a week, with 24 percent doing so once a day or more often.
- The participation rate in any one of three types of extracurricular activities—lessons or classes outside of school, volunteer or community service activities, and organized school or community groups—was 49 percent, ranging from 22 percent to 31 percent of youth across the three types of activities.
- Six percent of youth were reported never to see friends outside of organized activities, and 51 percent did not take part in any of the three types of extracurricular activities mentioned above.
- Two-thirds (69 percent) of out-of-high school youth with disabilities had driving privileges and 67 percent exercised civic participation through registering to vote.
- Several negative forms of community participation or involvement also characterized the out-of-high school experiences of some youth with disabilities. For example, 21 percent reported having been in a physical fight in the past year, 11 percent reported carrying a weapon in the past 30 days, and 2 percent reported being gang members.
- Fifty-three percent of out-of-high school youth with disabilities reported at some time having been stopped and questioned by police for reasons other than a traffic violation, and 28 percent had been arrested. Fifteen percent had spent a night in jail and 17 percent were reported to have been on probation or parole.

## **Disability Category Differences**

Disability category differences are apparent in many of the post-high school outcomes examined in this report. For example, youth with sensory impairments, emotional disturbances, mental retardation, or multiple disabilities were quite different from each other in their patterns of post-high school outcomes.

### ***Youth With Sensory Impairments***

- For example, youth with visual or hearing impairments were more likely to attend postsecondary school (78 percent and 72 percent, respectively) than were those with speech/language, other health, or orthopedic impairments; learning disabilities; multiple disabilities; emotional disturbances; or mental retardation (55 percent, 55 percent, 54 percent, 47 percent, 35 percent, 34 percent, and 27 percent, respectively).
- Youth with visual or hearing impairments also were more likely to consider themselves to have a disability (83 percent and 71 percent, respectively) than were youth in the categories of orthopedic, other health, or speech/language impairment; mental retardation; traumatic brain injury; learning disability; or emotional disturbance

(69 percent, 43 percent, 26 percent, 60 percent, 53 percent, 43 percent, and 37 percent, respectively). Postsecondary students with visual or hearing impairments were more likely to have disclosed that disability to their postsecondary schools (79 percent and 65 percent, respectively) than were youth with orthopedic, other health, or speech/language impairments; mental retardation; traumatic brain injuries; learning disabilities; or emotional disturbances (63 percent, 38 percent, 18 percent, 56 percent, 52 percent, 36 percent, and 21 percent, respectively). Youth with visual or hearing impairments also were more likely to have received accommodations and supports from their schools because of a disability (58 percent and 56 percent, respectively) than were youth in the categories of traumatic brain injury; orthopedic, other health, or speech/language impairment; mental retardation; learning disability; and emotional disturbance (46 percent, 40 percent, 19 percent, 10 percent, 26 percent, 24 percent, and 13 percent, respectively).

- Employed youth with visual or hearing impairments were more likely to have disclosed a disability to employers (65 percent and 60 percent, respectively) compared with youth with other health impairments, mental retardation, emotional disturbances, learning disabilities, or speech/language impairments (29 percent, 25 percent, 18 percent, 16 percent, and 15 percent, respectively).
- Youth with hearing or visual impairments also were more likely to use computers at least daily to e-mail, instant message, or participate in chat rooms (39 percent and 45 percent, respectively) compared with youth with mental retardation (12 percent); youth with visual impairments also exceeded those with emotional disturbances (19 percent) in their use of electronic communication. Youth with visual impairments were more likely to have taken lessons or classes outside of formal school enrollment (52 percent) than were youth in the categories of emotional disturbance (19 percent) or mental retardation (9 percent). They also had a significantly higher rate of participation in volunteer or community service activities (67 percent) than did youth in seven disability categories: learning disability (25 percent); mental retardation (20 percent); emotional disturbance (24 percent); hearing, orthopedic, and other health impairment (26 percent, 28 percent, and 24 percent, respectively); and autism (16 percent). Youth with visual impairments also were more likely to have belonged to an organized community or extracurricular group than youth with mental retardation (46 percent vs. 12 percent).

### ***Youth With Emotional Disturbances***

- Youth in several categories were more likely than those with emotional disturbances to have enrolled in postsecondary programs, including those with visual or hearing impairments; autism; other health, speech/language or orthopedic impairments (34 percent vs. 78 percent, 72 percent, 58 percent, 55 percent, and 54 percent, respectively). Youth with emotional disturbances who were enrolled in postsecondary programs were more likely than youth in several other disability categories to report that they did not consider themselves to have a disability, including those with autism, hearing or visual impairments, and multiple disabilities (63 percent vs. 31 percent, 29 percent, 17 percent, and 19 percent, respectively). Thus, youth in several other categories were more likely to have informed their schools of a disability than were

those with emotional disturbances, including youth with visual, hearing, or orthopedic impairments; multiple disabilities; mental retardation; and autism (21 percent vs. 79 percent, 65 percent, 63 percent, 79 percent, 56 percent, and 55 percent, respectively).

- Involvement with the criminal justice system also was more common for youth with emotional disturbances than those in many other categories. They were more likely to have been stopped by the police other than for a traffic violation (82 percent) than youth in all other categories except traumatic brain injury (17 percent to 54 percent).
- Youth with emotional disturbances also were more likely to have spent a night in jail (39 percent) than youth with other health or speech/language impairments (18 percent and 8 percent, respectively), visual or hearing impairments (6 percent), mental retardation (14 percent), traumatic brain injuries (12 percent), learning disabilities (11 percent), multiple disabilities or deaf-blindness (4 percent), or autism or orthopedic impairments (2 percent).
- Arrest was more common among youth with emotional disturbances (60 percent) than youth in all of the other categories, whose arrest rates ranged from 3 percent to 27 percent. They also were more likely to have been on probation or parole (39 percent) than youth in all other categories except traumatic brain injury (1 percent to 16 percent).

### ***Youth With Mental Retardation or Multiple Disabilities***

- Youth with mental retardation or multiple disabilities were exceeded by youth in several categories in their rates of being engaged in school, work, or preparation for work. For example, youth with other health impairments were more likely than those with mental retardation or multiple disabilities to report having been engaged in these activities since leaving high school (92 percent vs. 66 percent and 65 percent, respectively). Youth with learning disabilities or visual or hearing impairments also significantly exceeded youth with mental retardation in their rates of engagement (89 percent, 88 percent, and 86 percent, respectively, vs. 66 percent).
- In the postsecondary education domain, students with multiple disabilities were more likely to have reported considering themselves as having a disability than were those with speech/language impairments or emotional disturbances (81 percent vs. 27 percent and 37 percent). Students with multiple disabilities also were more likely to receive accommodations or supports because of a disability than were those with speech/language impairments, emotional disturbances, or other health impairments (67 percent vs. 10 percent, 13 percent, and 19 percent, respectively).
- In the social domain, 33 percent of youth with multiple disabilities reported seeing friends informally at least weekly. This rate was exceeded by youth in the categories of learning disability and visual impairment (92 percent), emotional disturbance (84 percent), and speech/language, hearing, and other health impairment (88 percent, 82 percent, and 79 percent, respectively). Youth with visual, hearing, or other health impairments also were more likely than youth with mental retardation to have belonged to an organized community group, taken extracurricular lessons or classes, or taken part in volunteer service activities (82 percent, 59 percent, and 58 percent, respectively, vs. 28 percent).



- In the financial domain, youth in most disability categories were more likely to have used several types of financial tools than were youth with mental retardation. For example, compared with youth with mental retardation, youth with hearing or other health impairments were more likely to have a savings account (65 percent and 66 percent, respectively, vs. 41 percent), checking account (63 percent and 58 percent, respectively, vs. 26 percent), or credit card (37 percent and 36 percent, respectively, vs. 9 percent), and those with visual or speech/language impairments or learning disabilities were more likely to have a checking account (71 percent, 57 percent, and 49 percent, respectively) or credit card (51 percent, 34 percent, and 31 percent, respectively).

From 65 percent to 92 percent of those in every disability category had engaged in school, work, or training for work since leaving high school. With the exception of youth with multiple disabilities, more than half of youth in each category (59 percent to 92 percent) saw friends at least weekly, and from 59 percent to 78 percent were registered to vote.

### **Differences in Experiences by Length of Time Out of High School**

Youth included in this report varied in their length of time out of high school, ranging from 1 month or less to 4 years post-high school. Thirty-nine percent of youth had been out of high school less than 1 year, 26 percent out between 1 and 2 years, and 36 percent out of high school for 2 to 4 years. Most post-high school experiences did not differ significantly across the number of years since youth had left high school. The experience that did differ by length of time out of high school was related to enrollment in postsecondary school. The likelihood of ever having been enrolled in postsecondary education was higher for those who had been out of high school longer than 1 year. Thirty-one percent of those out of high school up to 1 year had been enrolled in postsecondary school at some point, compared with 63 percent of those out of high school 1 to 2 years and 65 percent of those out of high school 2 to 4 years.

### **Differences in Experiences by High School Completion Status**

High school completers (those who graduated, received a certificate of attendance or completion, or who passed a high school exit exam or completed a GED program) were more likely to experience several positive post-high school outcomes than were the approximately 20 percent of youth with disabilities who left high school without finishing.

- High school completers were three times as likely as their peers who did not complete high school to have enrolled in a postsecondary school (51 percent vs. 17 percent).
- School completion status was not significantly related to rates of employment; however, those who had completed high school were more likely than noncompleters to use financial tools, such as savings (60 percent vs. 35 percent) or checking accounts (53 percent vs. 13 percent) or credit cards (32 percent vs. 8 percent).
- High school completers were more likely than noncompleters to take part in some form of community activity (55 percent vs. 20 percent) and in extracurricular classes specifically (26 percent vs. 4 percent).
- Youth who left high school without finishing were more likely than high school completers to have been involved with the criminal justice system, including being stopped by police other than for a traffic violation (73 percent vs. 48 percent), arrested (49 percent vs. 22 percent), and put in jail overnight (33 percent vs. 11 percent).

## Demographic Differences in Post-High School Experiences

Differences were apparent across youth demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, household income, and race/ethnicity for some post-high school outcomes but not for others.

Postsecondary school enrollment; engagement in school, work, or training for work; and most aspects of independence, including residential arrangements, marital status, having driving privileges, and using personal financial management tools, were similar for young men and women with disabilities. However, some gender differences were apparent:

- Males were more likely than females to work full time (68 percent vs. 35 percent).
- Males were more likely than females to report carrying a weapon in the preceding 30 days (17 percent vs. 1 percent), to have been stopped by police other than for a traffic violation (59 percent vs. 38 percent), and to have been arrested (33 percent vs. 17 percent).

Youth with disabilities who came from households with different income levels were similar in several aspects of their post-high school experiences. For example, social and community involvement, residential independence, parenting status, and involvement in violence-related activities or with the criminal justice system did not differ significantly by the economic status of the households in which youth with disabilities grew up. However, youth from wealthier families<sup>3</sup> were more likely than their peers to experience several positive outcomes:

- Those from households with incomes of more than \$50,000 were almost twice as likely as their peers from household with incomes of \$25,000 or less to have enrolled in 2-year colleges (57 percent vs. 30 percent), to have been employed since leaving high school (81 percent vs. 61 percent), and to have been productively engaged in education, employment, or job training since leaving high school (93 percent vs. 75 percent).
- They also were more likely to have a savings (69 percent vs. 40 percent), a checking account (60 percent vs. 29 percent), or a credit card (44 percent vs. 11 percent). Youth with disabilities in the highest income group were more likely to be reported to have electronic communication at least daily than youth from households in the lowest income group (33 percent vs. 13 percent), and youth with disabilities from the middle and the upper income groups were significantly more likely to have driving privileges than youth from households with incomes of \$25,000 or less (75 percent and 83 percent, respectively, vs. 51 percent).

Similarities and differences also were apparent for youth with different racial/ethnic backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> There were no significant differences across racial/ethnic groups in the likelihood of being engaged in school, work, or preparation for work; in postsecondary school enrollment; in social or community involvement; in parenting status; and in involvement in violence-related activities or with the criminal justice system. For post-high school outcomes that differed by race/ethnicity:

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<sup>3</sup> Parent/guardian household income was analyzed using three categories: \$25,000 or less, \$25,001 to \$50,000, and more than \$50,000.

<sup>4</sup> NLTS2 analyses included three racial/ethnic categories: White, African American, and Hispanic.

- White youth were more likely to have been employed since high school than their African American peers (80 percent vs. 47 percent).
- White youth were more likely than Hispanic youth to live independently (29 percent vs. 10 percent) and were more likely than their African American peers to have a checking account (55 percent vs. 24 percent) and a driver's license (79 percent vs. 49 percent).

### **Comparisons With the General Population**

When similar data items were available, comparisons were made between youth with disabilities and the same-age youth in the general population. Comparison data were taken from The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 (NLSY97), 2001 data collection, and The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, (ADD Health), Wave 3, collected in 2001-02.

The picture of youth with disabilities presented in this report differed from that of youth in the general population in several dimensions; for example:

- Youth with disabilities were less likely to enroll in postsecondary programs than were their peers in the general population (45 percent vs. 53 percent).
- Rates of attendance at 2-year colleges were similar for both groups; the gap in postsecondary enrollment between youth with disabilities and those in the general population was most apparent for enrollment in 4-year universities (8 percent vs. 29 percent for enrollment at the time of the interview).
- Out-of-high school youth with disabilities were less likely than general population peers to be working when they were interviewed (57 percent vs. 66 percent), and the jobs held by youth with disabilities were of a shorter duration (on average, 10 months) than the average for youth in the general population (15 months) among those employed.
- Youth in the general population who were age 18 or older were more likely than their similar-age peers with disabilities to report ever having had sexual intercourse (83 percent vs. 73 percent). Youth with disabilities were more likely those in the general population to report having used any contraception (87 percent vs. 75 percent).
- Youth in the general population were more likely than youth with disabilities to have a checking account (68 percent vs. 46 percent) or a credit card (50 percent vs. 28 percent).

### **Cautions in Interpreting Findings**

Readers should remember the following issues when interpreting the findings in this report:

- The analyses are descriptive; none of the findings should be interpreted as implying causal relationships. Neither should differences between disability categories be interpreted as reflecting disability differences alone, because of the confounding of disability and other demographic factors.
- Data presented are combined youth self-report and parent-report data. If a Wave 3 youth interview/survey was completed, youth's responses to these items were used in this report. If a youth interview/survey could not be completed for an eligible youth or if a youth was reported by parents not to be able to participate in an interview/survey, parent responses were used. For the subsample of out-of-high school youth included in this report, the youth interview/survey was the source of data for post-high school outcomes for 84 percent of youth, and the parent interview was the source for 16 percent of youth. Combining data across respondents raises the question of whether parent and youth

responses would concur—that is, would the same findings result if parents’ responses were reported instead of youth’s responses. When both parents and youth were asked whether the youth belonged to an organized community group, currently worked for pay, and worked for pay in the past 2 years, and the wages currently employed youth earned per hour, their responses agreed from 69 percent to 80 percent of the time.

- It is important to note that descriptive findings are reported for the full sample of out-of-high school youth; those findings are heavily influenced by information provided for youth with learning disabilities, who constitute 64 percent of the weighted sample. Comparisons also were conducted between groups of youth who differed with respect to disability category, high school-leaving status and timing, gender, race/ethnicity, and household income. These bivariate analyses should not be interpreted as implying that a factor on which subgroups are differentiated (e.g., disability category) has a causal relationship with the differences reported. Further, readers should be aware that demographic factors (e.g., race/ethnicity and household income) are correlated among youth with disabilities, as well as being distributed differently across disability categories. These complex interactions and relationships among subgroups relative to the variables included in this report have not been explored.
- Several types of analyses were conducted for this report, including between-group means, between-group percentages, and within-subject percentages. Because of the weighted nature of NLTS2 data, equality between the mean values of the responses to a single survey item in two disjoint subpopulations was based on a test statistic essentially equivalent to a two-sample *t* test for independent samples using weighted data. Sample sizes for each group being compared were never less than 30. For a two-tailed test, the test statistic was the square of the *t* statistic, which then followed an approximate chi-square distribution with one degree of freedom, that is, an *F* (1, infinity) distribution.
- Although discussions in the report emphasize only differences that reach a level of statistical significance of at least  $p < .01$ , the large number of comparisons made in this report will result in some significant differences that are “false positives,” or differences mistakenly determined to be significant when they are not (i.e., type I errors). Readers also are cautioned that the meaningfulness of differences reported here cannot be derived from their statistical significance.

## Looking Ahead

This report provides a national picture of the post-high school experiences of youth with disabilities who had been out of high school up to 4 years, how these experiences differed across disability categories and demographic groups, and, when data are available, how they compared with those of youth in the general population. NLTS2 will continue to follow the lives of youth with disabilities as they age, which will provide information to examine how post-high school outcomes might evolve over time.