

# The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults With Disabilities up to 8 Years After High School

A Report From the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)





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## Executive Summary

Increasingly, researchers are contending that changes in the latter part of the 20th century and the early 21st century have prompted a reconsideration of the notion of adolescence (e.g., Fussell and Furstenberg 2005)—a developmental stage encompassing the years between 11 and 18 (Hall 1904)—being immediately followed by adulthood—a stage marked by “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). 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. Recognizing this reality, a growing body of research is focusing on the period of “early adulthood,” ages 18 through 34 (Furstenberg, Rumbaut, and Settersten 2005), as distinct from adolescence and full adulthood (e.g., Arnett 2001; Arnett 2002). The John T. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy recently assembled an extensive collection of analyses of the social forces shaping the early adult period and the experiences that characterize it (Settersten, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005). After reviewing the available data, however, the authors concluded that a need remains to “pioneer research efforts aimed at understanding the new frontiers of early adult life” (Settersten, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005, p. 7).

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 addresses questions about youth with disabilities in transition by providing information over a 10-year period about a nationally representative sample of secondary school students 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 was designed to collect data on sample members from multiple sources in five waves, beginning in 2001 and ending in 2009.

This document uses information about these former secondary school students to describe the experiences of young adults with disabilities in the postsecondary education, employment, independence, and social domains in their first 8 years out of high school.

Much of the information reported in this document comes from young adults 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 2009, as part of NLTS2’s fifth and final wave of data collection, referred to as Wave 5. Data for young adults 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

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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.

those who were known to be out of high school at the time of the Wave 5 data collection in 2009. In constructing variables that describe young adult's experiences since leaving high school, data from the Wave 2 through Wave 4 parent and youth telephone interviews and mail surveys (conducted in 2003, 2005, and 2007, respectively) also were used for young adults who were out of high school at the time of each data collection. When similar data items were available, comparisons were made between young adults with disabilities and the same-age young adults in the general population. The analyses approach used for the general population data bases mirrors the approach used for NLTS2 data. General population comparison data were taken from The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 (NLSY97), 2005 data collection, from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Wave 3 collected in 2001-2002, and from the Current Population Survey (CPS) 2009.<sup>2</sup> Comparison analyses of these weighted data included a subset of respondents who were out of high school at the time and were 21 to 25 years old.<sup>3</sup>

This report focuses on the subset of young adults with disabilities who were out of secondary school and 21 to 25 years old when telephone interviews were conducted with their parents and, whenever possible, with the young adults themselves in 2009. Young adults included in this report varied in the length of time they were out of high school, ranging from less than 1 month to 8 years post-high school. NLTS2 findings reported in this document use information collected from these young adults or parents to describe the experiences of young adults with disabilities in the postsecondary education, employment, independence, and social domains in their first 4 years out of high school. Findings are presented for young adults with disabilities as a whole and for those who differ in disability category, length of time out of high school, highest level of educational attainment, gender, parent's household income, and race/ethnicity.

This report is organized to provide information on young adults with disabilities in several key domains, including the following:

- Postsecondary education enrollment, educational experiences, and completion.
- Employment status and characteristics of young adults' current or most recent job.
- Productive engagement in school, work, or preparation for work.
- Residential independence; the prevalence of marriage and parenting; 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 young adults with disabilities as a group as well as all differences between young adults who differ in their length of time since leaving high school, highest level of educational attainment, 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.

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<sup>2</sup> The time period for Add Health Wave 4, collected in 2007-08 would have been a more appropriate comparison for the 2009 Wave 5 NLTS2 data; however, the items related to financial independence were not collected in Add Health Wave 4.

<sup>3</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.

## Postsecondary Education

Over the course of a lifetime, an individual with a college degree will earn \$1 million more on average than a worker with a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Commerce U.S. Census Bureau 2002). As the U.S. economy becomes progressively more knowledge based, attaining a postsecondary education becomes more critical (Carnevale and Desrochers 2003). For example, only 20 percent of workers needed at least some college for their jobs in 1959; by 2000, that number had increased to 56 percent (Carnevale and Fry 2000).

Along with their peers in the general population, young adults with disabilities are increasingly focusing on postsecondary education. Postsecondary education is a primary post-high school goal for more than four out of five secondary school students with disabilities who have transition plans (Cameto, Levine, and Wagner 2004). NLTS2 provides the opportunity to examine the postsecondary education experiences of young adults with disabilities who have been out of secondary school up to 8 years.

- Sixty percent of young adults with disabilities were reported to have continued on to postsecondary education within 8 years of leaving high school.
- Young adults with disabilities were more likely to have enrolled in 2-year or community colleges (44 percent) than in vocational, business, or technical schools (32 percent) or 4-year colleges or universities (19 percent).
- The mean time between leaving high school and enrolling in a postsecondary school was 7 months; however, the median was 3 months.
- Most students with disabilities were enrolled in postsecondary education programs on a consistent (77 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 (51 percent vs. 30 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. Sixty-three 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. Twenty-eight percent of postsecondary students with disabilities identified themselves as having a disability and informed their postsecondary schools of their disability.
- Nineteen 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, 87 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 79 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 (88 percent) and that they “probably” or “definitely” (85 percent) were getting enough assistance.
- Forty-three percent of postsecondary students who had not received any type of help with their school work reported that it would have been helpful to have received assistance with school work.
- On average, students with disabilities who had been out of high school up to 8 years and had attended a 2-year or 4-year college had earned 59 semester credits. Those who had attended 2-year or community colleges had earned on average 23 semester credits, and those who ever had attended a 4-year college had earned 71 semester credits.
- Ninety percent of students with disabilities who were currently enrolled in postsecondary school reported that they were working toward a diploma or certificate.
- At the time of the Wave 5 interview, 41 percent of postsecondary students had graduated from their most recent postsecondary program; 31 percent had left their most recent postsecondary school prior to completing, and the remaining students still were currently enrolled in their postsecondary program at the time of the interview. Forty-one percent had completed their 2-year college programs, 57 percent had completed their vocational, business, or technical school programs, and 34 percent had completed their 4-year college programs.

## Employment

Many adults consider employment a central component of their lives, providing not only economic benefits, but also a social network and a sense of worth as a productive member of society (Levinson and Palmer 2005; Rogan, Grossi, and Gajewski 2002). Indeed, employment has been linked to a range of positive outcomes, including financial independence and enhanced self-esteem (Fabian 1992; Lehman et al. 2002; Polak and Warner 1996). Given the importance of post-high school employment, preparation for employment is a primary focus of many transition services for secondary-school-age youth with disabilities, and achieving employment is the primary transition goal of the majority of secondary students with disabilities served under IDEA (Cameto, Levine, and Wagner 2004).

- Working for pay outside the home was an aspect of the post-high school experiences of a majority of young adults with disabilities. Ninety-one percent of young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 8 years reported having been employed at some time since leaving high school, holding an average of four jobs during that time.
- Among young adults with disabilities who had been out of high school 8 years, 67 percent worked full time at their current or most recent job.
- Wages of working young adults averaged \$10.40 per hour, and 61 percent received at least one of the benefits investigated in NLTS2 (paid vacation or sick leave, health insurance, or retirement benefits).

- The average hourly wage of young adults with disabilities who were employed full time was significantly higher than that of young adults working part time (\$11.00 vs. \$9.00).
- Young adults working full time were more likely to receive employment benefits (paid vacation or sick leave, health insurance, and retirement benefits) than those working part time (77 percent vs. 31 percent).
- About 26 percent of working young adults reportedly had employers who were aware of their disability, and 7 percent reported receiving some kind of accommodation on the job, most often adaptations to assignments or supervisory arrangements.
- Approximately 88 percent of working young adults reported that they liked their job at least fairly well and 90 percent reported being treated pretty well by others at their job. Approximately 62 percent to 75 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, young adults 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 young adults 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 young adults 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 young adults 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.

- Ninety-four percent of young adults with disabilities who had been out of secondary school up to 8 years were reported to have been engaged in employment, postsecondary education, and/or job training during this post-high school period.
- Thirty percent had paid employment as their only mode of engagement since high school.
- Forty-two percent had been employed since leaving high school and also had been enrolled in postsecondary education.
- Nineteen 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 3 percent of those with disabilities.

## **Household Circumstances of Out-of-High School Young adults With Disabilities**

Markers on the path to adult responsibility typically have included financial and residential independence and self-sufficiency, marriage, and parenting (Arnett 2000; Chambers, Rabren, and Dunn 2009, Rindfuss 1991; Settersten 2006).

- Within 8 years of leaving high school, 59 percent of young adults with disabilities had lived independently (on their own or with a spouse, partner, or roommate), and 4 percent had lived semi-independently (primarily in a college dormitory or military housing).
- When young adults were asked about their satisfaction with their current living arrangement, 69 percent reported being satisfied with their residential arrangement.
- Twenty-nine percent of young adults with disabilities reported having had or fathered a child by the time they had been out of high school for up to 8 years. Twenty-two percent of males reported having fathered a child and 42 percent of females reported having had a child.
- Thirteen percent of young adults with disabilities were married.
- Fifty-nine percent of young adults with disabilities had a savings account, 59 percent had a checking account, and 41 percent had a credit card in their own name. Seventy-four 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 Young adults With Disabilities**

Social inclusion “rests on the principle that democratic societies are enriched by the full inclusion of their citizens in the ebb and flow of community affairs” (Osgood et al. 2005, p. 12). Consistent with this notion, the domains encompassed in an understanding of a successful transition to young adulthood for individuals with disabilities have long included living successfully in one’s community (Halpern 1985; National Center on Educational Outcomes 1993). An important aspect of whether a young adult 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 young adults with disabilities had active friendships—77 percent reported seeing friends outside of organized activities at least weekly.
- Fifty-four percent were reported to communicate by computer at least once a week, with 32 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 52 percent, ranging from 20 percent to 39 percent of young adults across the three types of activities.
- Eleven percent of young adults were reported never to see friends outside of organized activities, and 48 percent did not take part in any of the three types of extracurricular activities mentioned above.
- More than three-fourths (78 percent) of young adults with disabilities had driving privileges and 71 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 young adults with disabilities. For example, 11 percent reported having been in a physical fight in the past year and 17 percent reported carrying a weapon in the past 30 days.
- Fifty percent of young adults with disabilities reported at some time having been stopped and questioned by police for reasons other than a traffic violation, and 32 percent had been arrested. Seventeen percent had spent a night in jail and 18 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***

- Young adults with visual or hearing impairments were more likely to attend postsecondary school (71 percent and 75 percent) than those with emotional disturbances, multiple disabilities, or mental retardation (53 percent, 33 percent, and 29 percent, respectively). In addition, young adults with visual or hearing impairments were more likely to have enrolled in a 4-year college or university (40 percent and 34 percent) than those with emotional disturbances, autism, other health impairments, multiple disabilities, or mental retardation (7 percent to 20 percent), and those with visual impairments also were more likely to have attended a 4-year college than those with learning disabilities, orthopedic impairments, or traumatic brain injuries (21 percent, 26 percent, and 19 percent, respectively).
- Young adults with visual or hearing impairments were more likely to have received accommodations and supports from their schools because of a disability (59 percent and 53 percent, respectively) than were young adults with speech/language impairments, other health impairments, learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, or mental retardation (12 percent to 24 percent).
- Young adults with visual impairments were less likely to have been employed at the time of the interview than young adults with other health impairments, speech/language impairments, or learning disabilities (44 percent to 67 percent).
- Young adults with visual impairments were more likely to have disclosed a disability to their employers (75 percent) compared with young adults with learning disabilities, speech/language impairments, other health impairments, emotional disturbances, or traumatic brain injuries (19 percent to 30 percent).
- Young adults with hearing impairments were reported to be more likely to communicate by computer at least daily (e.g., e-mail, instant message, or participate in chat rooms), than those with emotional disturbances, autism, or multiple disabilities (21 percent to 51 percent).
- Young adults with visual impairments were more likely to have taken lessons or classes outside of formal school enrollment (38 percent) than were young adults with learning

disabilities, mental retardation, other health impairments, or traumatic brain injuries (12 percent to 20 percent). They also had a significantly higher rate of participation in volunteer or community service activities (44 percent) than did young adults with speech impairments or mental retardation (26 percent and 19 percent, respectively). Young adults with visual impairments also were more likely to have belonged to an organized community or extracurricular group than young adults with emotional disturbances (51 percent vs. 32 percent).

### ***Young Adults With Emotional Disturbances***

- Young adults in several categories were more likely than those with emotional disturbances to have enrolled in 4-year colleges or universities, including those with speech/language impairments, hearing impairments, visual impairments, or orthopedic impairments (11 percent vs. 26 percent to 40 percent).
- Young adults with emotional disturbances who were enrolled in postsecondary programs were less likely than young adults in several other disability categories to have informed their schools of a disability, including those with orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, multiple disabilities, deaf-blindness, autism, or hearing impairments (27 percent vs. 59 percent to 76 percent).
- Involvement with the criminal justice system also was more common for young adults with emotional disturbances than those in many other categories. Overall, 75 percent of young adults with emotional disturbances had been involved with the criminal justice system at some point in their lives. Their rate of ever having been involved in the criminal justice system at all was significantly higher than the rates for those in all other disability categories (26 percent to 55 percent).
- Young adults with emotional disturbances were more likely to have been stopped by the police, other than for a traffic violation, in the past 2 years (43 percent) than young adults in all other categories except traumatic brain injury (4 percent to 21 percent).
- Young adults with emotional disturbances also had significantly higher rates of being arrested in the past 2 years (27 percent) than those in all other categories except traumatic brain injury (less than 1 percent to 12 percent). They were more likely to have spent a night in jail in the past 2 years (19 percent) than young adults with in all other categories except traumatic brain injury and other health impairment (less than 1 percent to 8 percent).
- Young adults with emotional disturbances also were more likely to have been on probation or parole in the past 2 years (15 percent) than young adults in all other categories except traumatic brain injury and other health impairment (less than 1 percent to 8 percent).

### ***Young Adults With Mental Retardation or Multiple Disabilities***

- Young adults with mental retardation or multiple disabilities were exceeded by young adults in several categories in their rate of enrollment in postsecondary education. Those with learning disabilities; speech/language impairments, hearing impairments, visual impairments, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, or traumatic brain injuries were more likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education than those with multiple disabilities or mental retardation (61 percent to 75 percent vs. 33 percent and

29 percent, respectively). Young adults with emotional disturbances, autism or deaf-blindness (53 percent, 44 percent, and 57 percent, respectively) also significantly exceeded young adults with mental retardation in their rates of postsecondary enrollment.

- Students with multiple disabilities were more likely to receive accommodations or supports from their postsecondary schools because of a disability than were those with speech/language impairments, learning disabilities, or other health impairments (46 percent vs. 12 percent, 17 percent, and 15 percent, respectively).
- In the employment domain, young adults with mental retardation or multiple disabilities were less likely to have been employed at the time of the interview than young adults with other health impairments, speech/language impairments, learning disabilities, or hearing impairments (39 percent and 39 percent vs. 57 percent to 67 percent).
- Young adults with mental retardation or multiple disabilities worked fewer hours per week on average (28 hours and 25 hours, respectively) than those with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, speech/language impairments, or other health impairments (34 to 38 hours). Young adults with learning disabilities, speech/language impairments, hearing impairments, visual impairments, other health impairment, or emotional disturbances earned more per hour on average than their peers with mental retardation (\$10.50 to \$11.10 vs. \$7.90).
- Young adults with mental retardation or multiple disabilities were more likely to report that their employers were aware of their disability than young adults with learning disabilities, speech/language impairment, or other health impairments, emotional disturbances, or traumatic brain injuries (60 percent and 72 percent vs. 19 percent to 30 percent).
- In terms of residential independence, young adults with multiple disabilities were less likely to have lived independently than those with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, or speech/language impairments (16 percent vs. 65 percent, 63 percent, and 51 percent, respectively). In addition, they were less likely to be married than those with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, speech/language impairments, or mental retardation (1 percent vs. 11 percent to 15 percent).
- In the social domain, 53 percent of young adults with multiple disabilities and 58 percent of those with mental retardation reported seeing friends informally at least weekly. This rate was exceeded by young adults with speech/language impairments, learning disabilities, other health impairments, visual impairments, traumatic brain injuries, hearing impairments, or emotional disturbances (75 percent to 84 percent). Youth with visual or orthopedic impairments, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities 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 (47 percent vs. 62 percent to 67 percent).
- In the financial domain, young adults in most disability categories were more likely to have used several types of financial tools than were young adults with mental retardation. For example, compared with young adults with mental retardation, young adults with learning disabilities, speech/language impairments, hearing impairments, visual impairments, orthopedic impairments, or other health impairments were more likely to have savings account (42 percent vs. 63 percent to 67 percent), to have a checking

account (29 percent vs. 63 percent to 74 percent), or a credit card (19 percent vs. 47 percent to 57 percent).

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

Young adults with disabilities included in this report varied in their length of time out of high school, ranging from 1 month or less to 8 years post-high school. Twelve percent of young adults had been out of high school less than 3 years, 36 percent had been out from 3 up to 5 years, and 52 percent had been out of high school from 5 up to 8 years.

- Those who had been out of high school from 5 up to 8 years were more likely to receive paid vacation or sick leave (57 percent) and health insurance from their employer (53 percent) than those who had been out of high school for less than 3 years (27 percent and 32 percent, respectively).
- Young adults who were out of high school from 5 to 8 years or from 3 to 5 years were more likely to report having been engaged in employment, job training, or postsecondary education since high school than those who had been out of high school for less than 3 years (96 percent and 94 percent, respectively, vs. 85 percent).
- Young adults with disabilities out of high school from 5 to 8 years were more likely to report living independently than those out of high school for less than 3 years or (71 percent vs. 39 percent) and were more likely to live independently than those out of high school 3 to 5 years (48 percent).
- Young adults with disabilities out of high school from 5 to 8 years were more likely to report to have had or fathered a child than those out of high school for less than 3 years (36 percent vs. 18 percent).
- Marriage status differed significantly such that those out of high school from 5 up to 8 years were more likely to be married than those who left school for less than 3 years (17 percent vs. 3 percent).
- Those out of high school from 5 to 8 years were more likely to communicate by computer at least daily than those out of high school the shortest time (38 percent vs. 19 percent).
- Young adults out of high school from 5 to 8 years were more likely to be reported to have driving privileges than those who had been out of high school from 1 to 3 years (83 percent vs. 60 percent).

### **Differences in Experiences by Highest Level of Educational Attainment**

Several post-high school outcomes varied by level of educational attainment. Those who had higher levels of educational attainment were more likely to experience several positive post-high school outcomes. In contrast, young adults who had left high school without finishing were significantly more likely to have experienced each of the various forms of criminal justice system involvement.

- High school completers were approximately three times as likely as their peers who did not complete high school to have enrolled in a postsecondary school (65 percent vs. 23 percent).

- Young adults who had received a postsecondary education degree or certificate were more likely to be employed at the time of the interview than those with lower levels of educational attainment (83 percent vs. 38 percent to 58 percent).
- Average hourly wages were significantly higher for young adults with disabilities who had completed a postsecondary education program than for those who had completed high school or who had some postsecondary education (\$12.50 vs. \$9.80 per hour and \$9.80 per hour).
- Young adults whose highest education level was high school completion were more likely than those whose highest education level was some postsecondary education to report that their education was put to good use (84 percent vs. 63 percent).
- Young adults with disabilities who had completed postsecondary education or training were significantly more likely to have lived independently than those for whom high school was their highest level of education (74 percent vs. 50 percent).
- High school noncompleters were more likely to have had or fathered a child than young adults with disabilities who had earned a postsecondary degree or certificate (48 percent vs. 21 percent).
- Young adults with disabilities who had completed postsecondary education or training were more likely to have a savings account (78 percent), checking account (86 percent), or credit card (64 percent) than those who had not completed high school (25 percent, 25 percent, and 19 percent, respectively) and those for whom high school was their highest level of education (49 percent, 47 percent, 32 percent, respectively). In addition, young adults who had completed a postsecondary program were more likely to have had a checking account than those who had attended but not completed their postsecondary education (61 percent).
- High school completers were more likely to have had a savings or checking account than high school noncompleters (49 percent vs. 25 percent, 47 percent vs. 25 percent, respectively).
- High school noncompleters were more likely to report being in the lowest annual income category (\$25,000 or less) than those who had completed a postsecondary program (83 percent vs. 59 percent).
- Young adults with a postsecondary degree or certificate had higher weekly rates of seeing friends than those for whom completing high school was their highest level of educational attainment (90 percent vs. 70 percent).
- Those who had completed a postsecondary education program were more likely than high school completers to have participated in a volunteer or community service activity (39 percent vs. 19 percent) and were more likely than high school noncompleters to have been a member of a community group (48 percent vs. 24 percent) and to have engaged in any of the forms of community participation investigated in NLTS2 (66 percent vs. 29 percent).
- Postsecondary education degree were more likely to have a driver's license (95 percent) and to have registered to vote (89 percent) than high school noncompleters (62 percent and 48 percent, respectively) or completers (66 percent and 60 percent, respectively).

- Young adults who had some postsecondary education and those who had earned a postsecondary degree or license were more likely to have taken part in at least one of the modes of community participation investigated in NLTS2 than those who had not completed high school (55 percent and 66 percent vs. 30 percent).
- Young adults with disabilities who had not completed high school were more likely to have had each of the various forms of criminal justice system involvement than those who had earned a postsecondary degree or had completed their high school education, including being stopped by police for other than a traffic violation (75 percent vs. 42 percent and 48 percent, respectively); having been arrested (59 percent vs. 22 percent and 32 percent), spending a night in jail (40 percent vs. 10 percent and 17 percent), or having been on probation or parole (39 percent vs. 10 percent and 19 percent).

### **Demographic Differences in Post-High School Experiences**

Differences were apparent across young adults' demographic characteristics, including gender, age, household income, and race/ethnicity for some post-high school outcomes but not for others.

Postsecondary school enrollment or completion rates; 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:

- Young men with disabilities worked on average 38 hours per week, whereas young women averaged 32 hours of work per week.
- Forty-two percent of young women with disabilities had had a child since high school, whereas 22 percent of young men with disabilities had fathered a child.
- Young men were more likely than young women to report carrying a weapon in the preceding 30 days (24 percent vs. 7 percent); to have been stopped by police other than for a traffic violation (58 percent vs. 37 percent); to have been arrested (39 percent vs. 21 percent); and to have been jailed overnight (21 percent vs. 9 percent).

Young adults with disabilities who came from households with different income levels were similar in several aspects of their post-high school experiences. For example, postsecondary enrollment and completion rates, social and community involvement, residential independence, 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 young adults with disabilities grew up. However, young adults from wealthier families<sup>4</sup> were more likely than their peers to experience several positive outcomes:

- Young adults with disabilities from parent households with incomes of more than \$50,000, or \$25,001 to \$50,000 were more likely than those from households with incomes of \$25,000 or less to have been employed at the time of the interview (71 percent and 65 percent vs. 44 percent).

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<sup>4</sup> Parent/guardian household income was analyzed using three categories: \$25,000 or less, \$25,001 to \$50,000, and more than \$50,000.

- Those from households with incomes of more than \$50,000 were less likely to have been fired from their most recent job than were those from household with incomes of \$25,000 or less (4 percent vs. 20 percent).
- Compared with young adults with disabilities from households in the lowest income category (\$25,000 or less), those in the highest income category (more than \$50,000) were more likely to have a savings account (72 percent vs. 43 percent), checking account (70 percent vs. 40 percent), or a credit card (50 percent vs. 26 percent).
- Young adults who came from households in the highest income category were less likely to be in the lowest individual income category (\$25,000 or less) than those from households in the lowest income category (68 percent vs. 87 percent).
- Young adults with disabilities from the lower and middle income categories were more likely to have had or fathered a child than those from families with household incomes of more than \$50,000 (38 percent and 37 percent, respectively vs. 15 percent).
- Young adults with disabilities in the highest income group were more likely to be reported to have electronic communication at least daily than young adults from households in the lowest income group (37 percent vs. 20 percent), and young adults with disabilities from the upper income groups were more likely to have driving privileges than young adults from households with incomes of \$25,000 or less (87 percent, respectively, vs. 67 percent).

Similarities and differences also were apparent for young adults with different racial/ethnic backgrounds.<sup>5</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 or completion; in social or community involvement; and in involvement in violence-related activities or with the criminal justice system. For post-high school outcomes that differed by race/ethnicity:

- African American young adults with disabilities were more likely to have had or fathered a child than White young adults with disabilities (26 percent vs. 45 percent).
- White young adults with disabilities were more likely to be married than African American young adults with disabilities (17 percent vs. 4 percent).
- White young adults with disabilities were more likely to have a checking account or credit card than African American young adults with disabilities (66 percent vs. 39 percent for checking account; 44 percent vs. 26 percent for credit card).
- White young adults with disabilities were more likely than their African American peers to have driving privileges (84 percent vs. 63 percent).

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<sup>5</sup> NLTS2 analyses included three racial/ethnic categories: White, African American, and Hispanic.

## Comparisons With the General Population

When similar data items were available, comparisons were made between young adults with disabilities and same-age young adults in the general population. The analyses approach used for the general population data bases mirrored the approach used for NLTS2 data. Comparison data were taken from The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 (NLSY97), 2005 data collection, The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, (ADD Health), Wave 3, collected in 2001-02, and the Current Population Survey (CPS) 2009.

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

- Young adults with disabilities were less likely to have enrolled in postsecondary programs than were their peers in the general population (60 percent vs. 67 percent).
- Young adults with disabilities were more likely to have attended a 2-year college (44 percent) or a postsecondary vocational, technical, or business school (32 percent) than their peers in the general population (21 percent and 20 percent, respectively). In contrast, those with disabilities were less likely than their peers in the general population to have attended a 4-year university (19 percent vs. 40 percent).
- Postsecondary completion rates of students with disabilities were lower than those of similar-aged students in the general population (41 percent vs. 52 percent).
- Young adults with disabilities who had attended 2-year colleges were more likely to have completed their 2-year college programs than were those in the general population (41 percent vs. 22 percent); however, they were less likely than their general population peers to have completed their 4-year college programs (34 percent vs. 51 percent).
- Young adults with disabilities earned an average of \$10.40 per hour compared with \$11.40 per hour for young adults in the general population.
- Young adults with disabilities were less likely to live independently than were their peers in the general population (45 percent vs. 59 percent).
- The marriage rate for young adults with disabilities was lower than that of their peers in the general population (13 percent vs. 19 percent).
- Young adults in the general population were more likely than young adults with disabilities to have a checking account (59 percent vs. 41 percent) or a credit card (74 percent vs. 61 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 young adults' self-reports and parent-reported data. If a Wave 5 youth interview/survey was completed, young adults' responses to the items were used in this report. If a youth interview/survey could not be completed for an eligible young adult, or if a young adult was reported by parents not to be able to participate in an

interview/survey, parents' responses were used. For the subsample of out-of-high school young adults included in this report, the youth interview/survey was the source of data for post-high school outcomes for 65 percent of young adults, and the parent interview was the source for 35 percent of young adults. Combining data across respondents raises the question of whether parent and young adults' responses would concur—that is, would the same findings result if parents' responses were reported instead of young adults' responses. When both parents and young adults were asked whether the young adult attended community college, belonged to an organized community group, currently works for pay, and worked for pay in the past 2 years, their responses agreed from 73 percent to 88 percent of the time.

- It is important to note that descriptive findings are reported for the full sample of out-of-high school young adults; those findings are heavily influenced by information provided for young adults with learning disabilities, who constitute 63 percent of the weighted sample. Comparisons also were conducted between groups of young adults 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 young adults 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.

This report provides the final national picture of the post-high school outcomes and experiences of young adults with disabilities represented in NLTS2 who had been out of high school up to 8 years, how these outcomes and experiences differed across disability categories and demographic groups, by school completion status and years out of high school, and, when data were available, how they compared with those of young adults in the general population.