

Abstract

Empowering the Transition of Young Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) from School to Employment

An Inclusive Higher Education (IHE) program provides individualized Programs of Study in the areas of academic, social, vocational, and independence for students ages 18-29 with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). TigerLIFE is a USA federally recognized Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP). The University of Memphis Institute on Disability (UMID) offers a continuum of inclusive and transition-focused postsecondary programs that support students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in building skills for lifelong success. These include TigerLIFE, an innovative Inclusive Higher Education Program (IHE), also known as Post-Secondary Education (PSE) Transition programs that serve students across West Tennessee. Together, these initiatives provide access to college coursework, work-based learning, and career readiness while emphasizing self-determination, social inclusion, and independent living.

The University of Memphis TigerLIFE Postsecondary Education Program is a 60-hour program culminating in a completion award in Career and Community Studies. Participation in the Tiger LIFE program provides students with an option to continue their education beyond high school to increase employment opportunities. At the heart of TigerLIFE is a person-driven planning model that uses the Systems Approach to Placement (SAP). Through TigerLIFE, students experience authentic campus life, attending university classes, participating in extracurricular activities, and engaging with faculty and staff mentors.

The program delivers individualized academic and career support and fosters growth in independence, advocacy, and social integration. College Transition services complement this by offering job readiness training, employment placement, and hands-on experiences that connect students to the workforce and their communities. These programs equip neurodiverse students with the skills and confidence to pursue competitive integrated employment (CIE), advocacy, and independent adult living. Backed by a proven track record of success, UMID's inclusive postsecondary model is a powerful example of how higher education can drive equity, empowerment, and opportunity.

Programs in Inclusive Higher Education (IHE) began in the USA in 2008 with the change of USA Higher Education Act to support for this population at institutions of higher education. Programs are also spreading through South America, Europe, and the East. Such empowerment will continue to provide for this population.