



## The What Why & How of Inclusive Post-Secondary Education

### What is Inclusive Post-Secondary Education?

STEPS Forward, has been supporting students with developmental disabilities to access equitable, coherent, and Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (PSE) since 2001. Through partnerships with post-secondary institutions students who have finished their high school education are supported across BC to enrol at their local university or college to complete studies, over 4-5 years, in the field of their choice. The post-secondary institution recognizes students with a certificate at regular convocation alongside peers earning a bachelor's degree in the same concentration of studies.

### Why is Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Important?

The BC Initiative for Inclusive PSE opens opportunities for students leaving high school with an evergreen leaving certificate to continue their education at UBC, UBCO, ECUAD, SFU, TWU, NVIT, Uvic, & VIU.

The initiative supports students to challenge preconceptions about their desire and capacity as learners and is proving that students supported to have equitable access to PSE will benefit from the same outcomes as any student would, including greater autonomy, choice, paid work and social opportunities (Inclusive Post-Secondary Resources). We have seen an +80% employment rate with students we support, including many jobs in positions which have historically been inaccessible to individuals with developmental disabilities.

### Who Can Attend Inclusive Post-Secondary Education?

The BC initiative for Inclusive PSE supports a range of learners, there are no minimum academic or behavioral requirements to receive support and enroll at our partnered universities. We have a commitment to support students with significant and complex support needs, the only pre-requisite is a desire to continue learning at the post-secondary level.

Inclusive PSE initiatives have been initiated by people who were looking for equitable access to Post-Secondary Education. If you do not find your Post-Secondary Institution listed here, please contact us for further information, and to see how we can help.

*This work aligns with the Ministry's Vision for Student Success which highlights Future Orientation and Student-Centered learning as key principles.*



## Casey's Story

The high school years are a time of growth and curiosity for youth; the opportunities that are provided to students at this time of their life will set the stage for how they want to contribute to their greater community after graduation.

Casey's expectations in high school were no different than any student and her parents knew that because of her developmental disability it was even more critical for her to be given the same opportunities and experiences so she could grow as a person and have the same choices for her future that all students would including the choice to attend Post-Secondary Education.

When Casey and her family learned that inclusive PSE was an option after high school they were able to clearly describe their vision for the future to her teachers and school administration. Casey told them about her future goal to attend PSE and the path became much clearer for everyone. This led to expectations that were the same as any student and opened up opportunities for Casey to explore, dream big and learn alongside her same age peers.

Casey attended the same classes as any student would, she learned about cell biology in Science class, Shakespeare in English, and played the trombone in music. She took pictures for the yearbook club and was a keen school ambassador. Just like her classmates, Casey met with her school counsellor and learned about her university options. She discovered her strengths and interests in Career Life Education and Connections and explored her choices for the future.

A student's experience while in high school will greatly influence their decision to go on to post-secondary education, so it was natural that just like many of her fellow classmates without a disability, Casey also had big dreams and wanted to plan for Post-Secondary Education.

Grade 12 was a highlight and a year Casey will never forget. She applied to the university of her choice, she received her first scholarship, took part in all the grad activities and even took her first international school trip as senior member of the school band.

At the graduation ceremony when the principal presented Casey with her evergreen certificate and announced to the audience the scholarship she would receive and the university she would attend, Casey walked across that stage feeling so proud of what she had accomplished and the person she had become. Casey was ready for the next chapter of her life and had the tools and the right expectations to make it happen.

## Conclusion

While Casey's story is true it is more the exception than the rule. Families have told us they were not aware their loved one with a developmental disability could go on to PSE because the resources to support their child's transition lacked a vision for a meaningful and fulfilling life including the possibility to go to PSE.

By creating awareness and broadening access to PSE pathways and career planning students with developmental disabilities will see what is possible, and have more choices to learn, develop careers and pursue their passions alongside other students at PSE and beyond.

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