

Emerald's Story:
Education as a Life-Long Value

This series of stories aims to shed light on the transformative power of higher education credentials for students with intellectual disability. Through real-life examples, we explore how earning credentials in various fields has not only equipped these individuals with essential skills but has also paved the way for meaningful employment opportunities.

4-year university

Education/ASL

Colorado

Emerald learned about the importance of education from a young age. She said, "I spent a lot of years when I was a kid in a Chinese orphanage, and I did not get to go to school. Now that I have a chance I want to learn a lot." Emerald chose to attend University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS) where she had the opportunity to explore her career interests in teaching and supporting Deaf students.

The Office of Inclusive Services (OIS) at UCCS offers a 4-year, inclusive program for transition-age adults with intellectual disability. The program is accredited by the Inclusive Higher Education Accreditation Council (IHEAC). Students earn a Comprehensive Higher Education Certificate with a specific area of focus. To earn this certificate, students must complete 75 credits/clock hours, maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher, take at least half of their courses in their area of focus, successfully complete four semesters of work experience, and participate regularly in campus activities with other UCCS students.

Emerald earned her Comprehensive Higher Education Certificate in 2024. She successfully completed five American Sign Language (ASL) courses and gained the skills to use ASL proficiently. Additionally, Emerald took Deaf Culture and Special Topics in ASL Deafhood, two courses that gave her insight into the experiences of the Deaf community. Emerald took Human Services courses as well to gain skills for working in helping professions and communicating effectively. She said, "my classes impacted my life by opening up opportunities for my career and made me feel more confident in communicating with Deaf people and helping them to be successful, which made me feel good about myself."



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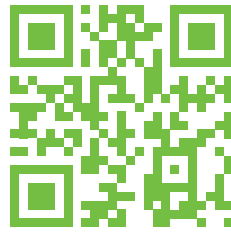
The classes Emerald took at UCCS, while receiving services from the OIS, allowed her to learn ASL, which is essential for a career in supporting Deaf students. Her certificate also allowed her to learn all the soft skills needed to be successful in a teaching job. She learned to keep a calendar, write and respond to texts and emails, be on time, complete her work, communicate with co-workers, and be a great team player. Her credential led to a job after college as a Teacher's Assistant at the Colorado School for the Deaf & Blind doing the work she loves in her area of study.

Why are postsecondary education credentials important?

Earning a postsecondary education credential creates a better starting point for students with intellectual disability entering the job market and adult life. Those who access higher education are more likely to be employed, earn higher wages, and have stronger social and professional networks. There are more than 350 colleges and universities in the US with various credential options providing college students with intellectual disability opportunities for better employment outcomes and more successful adult lives.



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pathway stories



Learn more about inclusive
postsecondary education



See the data on employment
outcomes of students with
intellectual disability



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The Inclusive Higher Education Network is a national technical assistance and dissemination center, funded by the US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. The Network is tasked with increasing regional and state capacity, building awareness, creating strategic partnerships, and supporting expansion and improvement of higher education for students with intellectual disability through resource and training development.

Learn more about TCN at thinkcollege.net/projects/tcn

This is a publication of the Think College Inclusive Higher Education Network at the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston, funded by the Office of Postsecondary Education (Grant No. P407C210001). The opinions contained in this document are those of the grantee and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders.

Recommended citation: Inclusive Higher Education Network. (2025). Emerald's Story: Education as a Life-Long Value. Think College Stories: Credential Pathways. Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston.