

CREDENTIAL PATHWAYS

Makena's Story: Successful Employment with Support & Dedication

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

Animal Science & Education

Colorado

Makena wanted to go to college because she loves to learn, and she was fortunate to have the support of her parents. She shared, "My parents were very helpful, and they always believed in me. They supported me to follow my dreams." With the support of her family and the staff at University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS), Makena earned a Comprehensive Higher Education Certificate with a focus on Animal Science & Education.

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. Peer mentors support students to participate in class with their fellow classmates, complete homework and submit assignments, learn to use Canvas and other technology, follow their schedule, and take advantage of all that the UCCS campus has to offer.

At UCCS, Makena took courses in biology, nutrition, and animal sciences to learn all about animals. Makena also took courses such as Public Speaking that helped build communication and teamwork skills. She said, "I got support from the staff. They made modifications, and my mentors helped me with my course assignments. I also learned a lot about being on time and using my calendar. My mentors and staff and I all worked together, and I was able to get my credential." Makena earned her certificate in 2024.

Makena was also supported by staff at OIS to get her driver's license. She says she is practicing a lot and hopes to someday have the confidence to drive more. Makena's job at the UCCS Campus Farm taught her a great work ethic and some of the basics of having a job, like how to clock in and out, turn in your timecard, and communicate with your boss.

About her overall college experience, Makena said, "I got such a great life by going to college. It is a lot of hard work, and it is also the best ever!" She learned to be confident and to work hard. She is working part time at the zoo and has enrolled at Pike's Peak State College to earn a certificate in Zoo Keeping Technology.



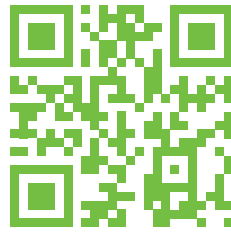
"I got such a great life by going to college." Makena learned to be confident and to work hard by going to college.

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



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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

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