
PATHS

Postsecondary Access and
Training in Human Services

BRIDGE *to* CAREER

in Human Services

The New Professionals

Highlights of Successful Graduates





The Postsecondary Access and Training in Human Services (PATHS) and the Bridge to Career in Human Services (B2C) are postsecondary education programs at Texas A&M University that are funded by the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (TDARS) and the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD). These are career programs for individuals with and without disabilities seeking careers in direct support. Direct support provides assistance to people who need help to be self-sufficient. Both programs offer an array of supplemental supports to students; additional support needs are based on individual assessments. These include, but are not limited to, intensive one-on-one academic assistance, life skills and independent living training and instruction, and peer-mentoring by college students who are completing their bachelors or masters programs. PATHS and B2C graduates, employed as direct support professionals (DSP), assist individuals

with disabilities to lead self-directed lives and meaningfully contribute to their communities. Graduates assist with activities of daily living if needed, and provide the encouragement needed for the supported individuals to develop attitudes and behaviors that enhance inclusion. PATHS and B2C graduates are employed to provide supports to persons with disabilities at home, work, school, church, and other community places. As a DSP student, graduates have received training to act as an advocate for themselves, facilitate the communication of needs, and support self-expression and individual goals. Specific employment settings include assisted living, day habilitation, residentials such as group homes, as well as primary private residences. The following is a collection of stories about students who have graduated from PATHS or B2C and become successfully employed as a result of their experiences with B2C and PATHS.

Nancy Flowers is an older woman who suffered traumatic brain injuries from an automobile accident. Before her automobile accident, Nancy worked for years in the private sector



Nancy Flowers

as a customer service representative and as an administrative assistant. Because of the accident, she lost the ability to perform many daily living skills including simple things like tying her shoe laces. But amazingly, she still maintained some of her knowledge and skills connected to using the computer. However, concentration on learning new skills and starting a new job became a huge challenge. Determined to get back to work after successful rehabilitation, Nancy found out about the PATHS program from a friend. She decided to challenge herself by enrolling in the program. Prior to and at the beginning of her admission to the program, PATHS staff met with her to discuss her goal, strengths, and support needs. Based on the discussions, a program plan was established that included accommodations to meet her individual needs. Some specific components of the plan included (a) participating in the core academic program with other students with accommodations for her leaving the classroom as needed so that she could refresh herself and focus; (b) using assistive technologies such as a smartphone to help her organize; (c) offering opportunities for her to work with seniors with special care needs; and (d) most importantly, helping her develop the confidence she was lacking. At the end of the program, Nancy made tremendous progress and growth in all areas, especially her improved confidence level she gained

from her success of completing the coursework and the practicum. As Nancy stated “it [the PATHS program] gave me the knowledge on what to do. If someone needs a certain type of help, I know where to find it. Before the program and even at midpoint, [I was] not sure if I was able to do the job. At the end, [I was] very confident.” During the practicum, Nancy worked with an elderly couple to take care of the husband three hours a day for three days per week and was paid minimum wage. After graduation, the same family hired her to take care of the wife seven days a week for at least four hours a day. Her pay rate was raised to \$12 per hour. The family is very appreciative of Nancy’s professionalism and caring attitude. Nancy loves her job and will continue to flourish in this new profession.

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Originally from Bremerhaven, Germany, **Justin Deleon** is a young man with a visual impairment, and is legally blind. Justin graduated from A&M Consolidated High School, in College Station, Texas. During high school Justin supported a student with cerebral palsy to complete tasks, while they both worked as office aides. After high school graduation, Justin began junior college and moved into an apartment with a roommate. He was using social security income (SSI) to live independently. He states that due to



Justin Deleon

his disability, he always needs to live where he can access a form of public transportation. Within the first year of junior college, Justin was not satisfied with the progress he was making and worked with his DARS Counselor to develop another plan. While attending a transition fair, Justin took his DARS Counselor's advice and spoke with representatives from the PATHS program. The next day, Justin began completing a PATHS program application. Preparing for a career as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) interested Justin and he felt like it was a "good fit." He stated, "As a DSP, I want to help people live a life they want, which everyone deserves." Prior to beginning the program, PATHS staff met with Justin to discuss his goals and supports he would use throughout the program. Justin carries a monocular telescope in his pocket that he uses to read when print is small. Justin accessed assignments and curriculum using applications on a laptop that included: reversing the computer screen to black background with white text, enlarging the font, and reading text aloud. For Justin, the most beneficial component of the PATHS program was listening to guest speakers describe advocacy and DSP responsibilities. During the practicum, Justin was hired to work 10 hours a week at \$10 per hour, supporting a Texas A&M student with cerebral palsy. Justin assisted the student with independent living skills each morning and evening, Monday through Friday. The PATHS program gave Justin a "new outlook on how to do things" and helped him realize what he would be doing when he provides support for an individual. Justin showed his dedication throughout the program and earned the honor of valedictorian. Throughout the next year, he continued working with the same student until that student graduated and relocated.

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Today, Justin draws from his experience as a PATHS student and DSP to work as a PATHS mentor and tutor. He works 15 hours a week and is paid \$12 per hour. Justin continues to live independently, enjoys preparing future DSPs, and is excited about the career he is building through supporting other people.

Amanda Ransleben has a congenital disability that causes some difficulties in cognitive functioning and communication. Amanda had great high school experiences where she enjoyed friendships and was actively involved in school and community activities, such as Special Olympics, helping in a life skill classroom, and being an office aid in school. Exploring higher education and employment options before graduation, Amanda found that the PATHS program suited her passions for helping people and met her career goal. Prior to the beginning of the program, Amanda worked with a team consisting of program staff, family members, and school counselors to identify personal interests and educational needs, develop long-term and short-term goals in various areas (e.g., money management and transportation), and set forth a number of expectations and timelines. Amanda started to work on her goals during the Bridge to Career summer program.



Amanda Ransleben

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While in the program, Amanda demonstrated professionalism, a great work ethic, and an eagerness

to learn. She followed suggestions and put forth efforts to improve her work constantly. The major supports that she needed from the program included: (a) assistive technologies (e.g., a screen reader); (b) independent living skills training (e.g., money management, taking transportation training, and cooking); (c) training for managing stress and anxiety; and (d) mentoring and tutoring support. With the supports, Amanda successfully completed all the coursework. During the practicum, Amanda worked at a Day Rehabilitation Center, where she supported people in various activities, such as eating, exercising, spelling and writing, and making handcrafts. She received complements from her employer on her professionalism and job skills. She felt that what she learned in class helped her on the job, especially topics like “Person Centered Thinking Training,” “Documentation,” “Abuse and Neglect,” “HIPPA,” “Safety,” and “Developing Employment Packets.” As she said, “the program [PATHS] helps me get my feet in, and get them wet to see just because you have a disability, [it] does not mean you cannot do anything, it just means you need to work a little harder. I learned a lot of skills, working with people... without PATHS program, I’ll not [be] where I am today.” Amanda served as the valedictorian in May 2012 because of her dramatic growth and excellent performance during the program. Following graduation, she continued to work in the Day Rehabilitation Center and received a pay raise. She started taking courses from a local college to achieve her ultimate career goal of working in a special education classroom to help children with special needs. She is also planning to move out of her parents’ house and get her own apartment.

Ana San Andreas is a young woman with a learning disability in addition to a rare genetic syndrome that causes low hearing and weakness in her arms. She had many prior experiences that helped her successfully



Ana San Andreas

complete the PATHS program. For example, Ana said she possessed strong study skills because she had taken general education classes in high school and had attended Blinn College and Sam Houston State University. She also had many independent living skills as a result of living with roommates and on her own during her two years at Sam Houston State. Ana’s volunteer experiences with Habitat for Humanity, Camp Sonrisa, and Camp for All helped her realize that she enjoys helping others. She said she was excited when she learned about PATHS because she felt it would “give me a purpose to guide my life because I had wanted to work with people with disabilities.” Ana described the PATHS program as challenging but said that the challenge made it interesting and worthwhile. Some challenges Ana faced were making new friends, learning how to get around College Station, and managing her money. She felt that

the B2C summer program helped her to feel comfortable with the other students and taught her to use the city

I had wanted to work with people with disabilities

bus. Her mentor taught her how to use Excel to keep track of her budget. Ana said that the parts of the curriculum that helped her most in her practicum placement were learning about the rights of people

with disabilities, how to match individual's interests with community resources, and how to document the activities she did with the person she supported. Ana's practicum placement was with an adult with a disability in a private home. The practicum was a great learning experience according to Ana, and she said she was fortunate because she continued to work for the same person even after her practicum. Ana currently lives with a roommate, takes sign language classes at Blinn College, and hopes to be either a DSP for a deaf person or a sign language interpreter.

Travis Hamil is a 20-year-old young man with a seizure disorder (successfully controlled by medication) and a mild intellectual disability. During high school, he had many opportunities to gain work



Travis Hamil

experiences through his life-skills class. For example, he worked in the school café, helped out with the recycling program, worked in the print shop, and assisted his teacher by being a class leader. He also gained job skills by volunteering with his church's mission program, which helped elderly community members with home repairs. These experiences made him realize how much he enjoys helping people, so when his mother asked him if he wanted to become a DSP, he was excited. Travis mentioned that he felt proud to be accepted to PATHS because he had always wanted to go to college. But, he was anxious because he was shy, would be away from home for the first time, and was unsure if he would be able to pass his classes. He credits the B2C program for helping him feel more confident because he learned how to use the city buses to access the community and what

to expect in the PATHS program. Travis' PATHS instructor said that Travis did a great job on his online modules and quizzes and that he was always on time and respectful to everyone. The academic accommodations and tutoring supports helped Travis to be successful in classroom and helped prepare him for his practicum. His practicum supervisor said that Travis was motivated and kept the clients in the group home engaged. These experiences showed Travis that he could be independent and make his own decisions. Since graduating from PATHS, Travis has worked in a group home, in a private home, and as a mentor for PATHS. He feels that PATHS provided him the skills he needs to enjoy his newfound independence. One of his future goals is to continue using the skills he acquired in PATHS to continue living in his own apartment and paying his bills. Even though Travis says he is still shy and still misses his mother, he knows that he can move to a new community, find a job and housing, and make new friends; and mom is just a phone call away.

Kelley Cotton, a 26-year-old woman, went through a series of brain surgeries that resulted in a visual impairment and a physical disability. Prior to beginning PATHS Kelley had little work or volunteer



Kelley Cotton

experience. Her educational experiences included high school general and special education classes and coursework at Job Corps after graduating high school. Leaving the Job Corps dorms, Kelley moved to College Station to live with her sister and brother-in-law. Kelley wrote on her PATHS application that she wanted to enroll in PATHS because of her desire

to help others. She believed the program would fit her personality and her career interests, teach her the foundations of becoming a DSP, and help her grow as a person. Upon entering the PATHS program, Kelley was unsure of her ability to be successful academically and independently. She struggled at the beginning of the program in both areas. To overcome her struggles in academics, she met with her advisor for tutoring; and to help develop her self-confidence, she advocated for an accommodation of her physical disability and earned her CPR certification. For help with living independently, Kelley attended transportation training at the Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living to learn the local bus systems. During her practicum, Kelley worked 20 hours a week at the local independent living center assisting with administration duties and providing support for various classes (e.g., cooking, fitness, and scrapbooking). Kelley independently rode the bus

to work and graduated with an A from the PATHS program. Following completion of the PATHS program, Kelley worked in a day habilitation center. Currently she works 40 hours a week as a live-in DSP for an individual with an intellectual disability. Kelley is living independently and loves her new career. She has increased her self-confidence so much that she is pursuing a driver's license. She credits PATHS with giving her a new lease on life and the opportunity of fulfilling her career dreams.



PATHS and B2C are both a two-semester, fully inclusive postsecondary certificate program that have been developed to provide academics, workforce development, and social skills development. B2C has an added component involving 4-5 week summer pre-college preparations for individuals with more significant support needs. A Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework has been utilized for designing the curricula and enables all individuals enrolled in the program to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. The underlying universal design structure of the program coursework allows a variety of possibilities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

The PATHS and B2C programs consist of the following three elements:

- a. Core Courses: Basic requirements of waiver and home health programs, including computer skills, assistive technology, documentation, and direct support skills training.
- b. Enrichment Courses: Person-centered thinking, self-determination and self-advocacy, communication, and job readiness skills.
- c. Practicum: A semester-long supervised and paid practicum with onsite evaluation and ongoing job readiness skills training.

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PATHS

Postsecondary Access and
Training in Human Services

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