



*Preparing young adults with learning difficulties for an independent life*

## **2016 Horizons School Survey of Alumni and Families**

### **Background and Purpose**

The Horizons School is accredited by NCASES and licensed by the Alabama State Department of Education to provide a non-degree post-secondary curriculum for young adults with learning disabilities. The Annual Curriculum for students in years 1-3 is illustrated in Table 1. Classes are offered in the domains of Career Independence, Personal Independence, Social Independence and Self-Determination. Goal setting and problem solving are addressed across all areas. During the academic year 2016-17, the School will commemorate its 25<sup>th</sup> year of serving students and families!

The Horizons School evaluates program outcomes, seeking perspectives of consumers (alumni and families). Emails and postcards with links to a confidential online survey were sent in February 2016 to alumni and families from the past seven years. Respondents chose to respond online, request a paper copy of the survey or respond via phone. The purpose was to solicit feedback about program effectiveness and student outcomes. This report summarizes highlights of 42 responses from alumni and their parents.

Table 1. The Horizons School Annual Curriculum Presented by Domain and Year

	<b>Career Independence</b>	<b>Personal Independence</b>	<b>Social Independence</b>	<b>Self-Determination</b>
<b>FIRST YEAR</b>	Career Orientation Career Exploration Social Skills/Business Communication Career Clusters Interview lab Job Shadow/fieldtrips Computer	Life Skills Apartment Health and Safety Cooking Nutrition/Meal Planning Money Management Budgeting Wellness Fitness Transportation/Field Ed Food inventory/Apt Skills RA Cleaning	Social Skills Core Values Conflict Management Relationship Seminar RA Seminar Self-Management	Learning Psychology Advising Aktion Club/Service Learning Art Creative Expression
<b>SECOND YEAR</b>	Career Orientation Career Seminar Computer Job Search On-the-job training Internships	Self-Management Personal Management Apartment Health and Safety Cooking Budgeting Money Management Fitness RA Cleaning	Social Skills Core Values Relationship Seminar RA Seminar	Life Management Advising Aktion Club/Service Learning Art Creative Expression
<b>THIRD YEAR</b>	Supported Employment Job Search Career Seminar/ Business Communication Computer	Apartment Site Visit Budgeting Money Management Wellness Fitness	Interpersonal Skills Problem Solving Communication Social Skills Supper Club	Advising Aktion Club/Service Learning

**Methods**

Brief surveys were developed by Horizons School administrators, faculty and staff using Survey Monkey. Multiple postcard and Email invitations with survey links were sent to alumni from the past seven years and their parents. Announcements with links were posted to the School’s Facebook page.

Each alumni and parent was invited to respond to a confidential survey online, request a paper copy to complete and return by US Mail, or respond via phone. Parallel forms elicited perspectives of former students and their parents to demographic items, and items about successful independent living and employment.

## Results

A total of 17 alumni attempted and 14 completed surveys summarizing student achievements, current residence, employment, volunteer service and self-determination. A second survey with parallel items was completed by 28 parents/guardians completed surveys. This report presents data from completed alumni and parent surveys, comparing responses to similar items across groups. In some, but not all instances, parents and alumni responded from the same family. Results are presented in five sections: **Demographics, Personal and Social Independence, Career Independence, Self-Determination and Overall Satisfaction.**

### Demographics -- Alumni

Fourteen alumni completed the graduate survey. Two reported being in a long-term committed relationship (been together for at least 1 year). One has two or more children. Twelve completed the core curriculum (Years 1 and 2); the majority (10 alumni) graduated in 2013 or later.

### Demographics – Reported by Parents

All parent respondents said their students graduated from Horizons School. Graduation years for these alumni are shown in Table 2. Five parents said their students are in a long-term committed relationship lasting one year or more. None said their graduate has children of their own.

Table 2. Parent Respondents Reporting Year of Student Program Completion (n=28).

Year of Program Completion	Frequency
Before 2010	4
2010 – 2011	5
2012 – 2013	9
2014 or later	10

### Personal and Social Independence

Horizons students move from supported residence in Terrace Court Apartments (Years 1 & 2), to independent community living with staff site visits (Transition Program in Year 3). Graduates and their parents were asked to report the type of residence and

with whom they live. The most common responses were “lives alone in an apartment or home,” and “lives with parent or other family member (primary caregiver)” as shown in Table 3. Twenty-one parents and 10 graduates reported living in their current residence for one year or more.

Table 3. Residence Status Reported by Parents and Alumni (n=40)

	Parents (frequency)	Alumni (frequency)
<b>Graduate lives alone in an apartment or home</b>	12	6
Lives with a roommate or partner	5	1
<b>Lives with a parent or other family member (primary caregiver)</b>	10	6
Lives with family member (not the primary caregiver)	0	N/A
Lives in a group residence	0	0

Ten of 13 alumni and 21 of 27 parents reported the graduate has lived at their current address for one or more years. When asked how the student found their current residence, the majority replied “a family member or friend assisted him or her,” (15 of 26 parents and 8 of 13 alumni). Six respondents said the individual found their residence without help from others.

Personal independence includes meeting daily living needs, alone and with assistance. Horizons students complete classes in Money Management and Budgeting, Field Education and Transportation, Health and Wellness, and Time and Self-Management. Alumni and parents answered four items indicating self-sufficiency in money management, transportation, health and wellness, and following a daily schedule.

Within Table 4 are responses to the question, “How do you (your student) primarily handle money?” The most common responses for parents and alumni were “I manage my own budget, bank account and spending,” and “A family member or friend

helps to manage my budget, bank account and spending.” One reported relying on an agency who charges fees to oversee personal finances.

Table 4. Money Management as Reported by Parents and Alumni (n=43)

	Parents (frequency)	Alumni (frequency)
<b>I manage my own budget, bank account and spending</b>	10	9
<b>A family member or friend helps to manage my budget, bank account and spending</b>	16	5
A person or business is paid to help manage my budget, bank account and spending	1	0
A trustee or guardian helps to manage my budget, bank account and spending	0	0
Other	2	0

Community access is vital to adult independence. Both groups were asked “which mode of transportation do you (your student) primarily use to access the community?” Responses are presented in Table 5, below. The most common responses were “I drive myself” and “I use public transportation.” Several indicated using multiple modes of transportation.

Table 5. Primary Modes of Community Access

	Parents (frequency)	Alumni (frequency)
I drive myself	10	3
I use public transportation (such as the bus, train, subway, etc.)	3	8
A family member or friend drives me	7	4
A person or business is paid to drive me	3	0
I use Paratransit (special service for people with disabilities)	1	2
I walk or other method (including Uber)	9	6

Personal health and wellness requires managing medication and health insurance, scheduling and attending clinical appointments, and reporting health history and symptoms. Alumni and parents indicated who is most responsible for managing these tasks as shown in Table 6, below. The majority of essential personal health tasks are **managed by the student**, sometimes with help of a family member or friend.

Table 6. Primary Responsibility to Manage Health and Wellness (frequencies)

	Managed by the Student	Managed by the Student with Assistance from Family Member or Friend	Managed by the Student with Assistance from an Agency	Managed by Family Member or Friend (not independent)
Medication Management	<b>Alumni = 12</b> <b>Parent = 11</b>	<i>Alumni = 1</i> <i>Parent = 5</i>	<i>Alumni = 0</i> <i>Parent = 0</i>	<i>Alumni = 0</i> <i>Parent = 1</i>
Scheduling Clinical Appointments	<b>Alumni = 9</b> <b>Parent = 0</b>	<i>Alumni = 4</i> <i>Parent = 1</i>	<i>Alumni = 0</i> <i>Parent = 1</i>	<i>Alumni = 0</i> <i>Parent = 3</i>
Managing Health Insurance	<i>Alumni = 3</i> <i>Parent = 0</i>	<i>Alumni = 8</i> <i>Parent = 4</i>	<i>Alumni = 0</i> <i>Parent = 1</i>	<i>Alumni = 2</i> <i>Parent = 7</i>
Attending Clinical Appointments	<b>Alumni = 10</b> <b>Parent = 3</b>	<i>Alumni = 3</i> <i>Parent = 4</i>	<i>Alumni = 0</i> <i>Parent = 0</i>	<i>Alumni = 0</i> <i>Parent = 1</i>
Reporting Health History and Symptoms	<b>Alumni = 10</b> <b>Parent = 7</b>	<i>Alumni = 3</i> <i>Parent = 4</i>	<i>Alumni = 0</i> <i>Parent = 0</i>	<i>Alumni = 0</i> <i>Parent = 2</i>

Horizons faculty rate student independence according to level of assistance required for task completion. The highest level is Independent performance, followed by Minimal Assistance, e.g., verbal or pictorial reminders. Direct Instruction means staff must work 1:1, providing verbal and physical cues, live or video modeling and feedback. Respondents from both groups, alumni and parents, rated performance of 8 functional tasks using the three-point scale (Independent, Minimal Assistance, Direct Instruction) as shown in Tables 7 & 8.

Table 7. Level of Independence for Daily Living Skills as Rated by Alumni (n=14)

	<b>Independent</b>	Minimal Assistance	Direct Instruction
Maintaining good personal hygiene	12	2	0
Planning healthy meals	11	2	1
Shopping for groceries	12	1	1
Cooking meals	10	2	0
Laundering clothes and linens	13	0	1
Dressing appropriately for the situation	13	0	1
Organizing and cleaning	11	2	1
Practicing home safety	13	0	1

Alumni overwhelmingly rated their living skills as performed independently. A majority of parents and guardians concurred, indicating lowest need for assistance to maintain good personal hygiene and highest need for assistance to plan healthy meals.

Table 8. Level of Independence for Daily Living Skills as Rated by Parents (n=27)

	<b>Independent</b>	Minimal Assistance	Direct Instruction
Maintaining good personal hygiene	24	3	0
Planning healthy meals	12	12	3
Shopping for groceries	20	3	4
Cooking meals	15	9	3
Laundering clothes and linens	25	1	1
Dressing appropriately for the situation	19	7	1
Organizing and cleaning	17	8	2
Practicing home safety	20	6	1

### **Career Independence**

Prevocational training, learning to identify and apply for paid work, practicing job interviews, and placement assistance are part of the Horizons School curriculum. Thirteen alumni and 28 parents responded to the item, “Are you (your student) currently employed for wages (receive a paycheck)?” Responses are presented in Table 9 and reveal the majority are employed at least part-time. Several are maintaining full-time employment.

Horizons School Career Team members compiled a database of student internships and paid employment positions. Students accepted a variety of positions across multiple career clusters, including Architecture and Construction (plumbers assistant); Food Service (busboy, hostess, janitorial); Personal Care and Services (activities assistant, care attendant, fitness center assistant); Educational and Social Services (education program assistant, library page, tour assistant); Plants, Animals and Natural Resources (kennel assistant, landscaping technician); Retail Services (cashier, warehouse distribution assistant, stocker, bagger, sales associate); and Transportation Services (IT assistant, auto detailer).

Table 9. Reported Employment for Wages Among Alumni (n=41)

	<b>Alumni (frequency)</b>	<b>Parents (frequency)</b>
<b>No, I do not work for a paycheck</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Yes, I am paid for a part-time job (work fewer than 34 hours weekly)</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Yes, I am paid for a full-time job (work greater than 34 hours weekly) without benefits (paid vacation, sick leave, insurance)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Yes, I am paid for a full-time job (work greater than 34 hours weekly), plus benefits (paid vacation, sick leave, insurance)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

Both groups (graduates and parents) were asked how long the student has been employed in their current paid position. Results in Table 10 reveal most have been employed for 7 months or longer. Fourteen of 20 parents and three alumni reported employment has lasted more than one year.

Table 10. Length of Employment in Current Position (n=31)

	<b>Parents (frequency)</b>	<b>Alumni (frequency)</b>
<b>0 to 6 months</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>7 months to 1 year</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Between 1 and 2 years</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3 years or more</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>

Alumni and parents reported how they obtained the current paid job as shown in Table 11. It is encouraging to note how many graduates successfully applied acquired skills to seek and apply for paid work. Several received support from a local agency or contractor to obtain employment. One continued as a paid employee in a job first obtained through a cooperative education program in high school.

Table 11. How Current Paid Job Was Obtained (n=33)

	<b>Parents (frequency)</b>	<b>Alumni (frequency)</b>
<b>Student found job independently</b>	9	7
<b>Student found job with assistance of family member or friend</b>	2	1
<b>Student found work with assistance of an agency, such as vocational rehabilitation or contractor</b>	7	1
<b>Student found work with assistance from The Horizons School</b>	3	3

It is also important to query graduates who are currently unemployed to determine ongoing job placement support and participation in an internship or volunteer position. Results presented in Table 12 indicate that one receives ongoing support from a vocational rehabilitation, government agency, or local employment agency. Three received job placement support through The Horizons School Graduate Program, Triumph Services or LEAP at Kennedy Krieger.

Four graduates are volunteering for a local organization and one is completing an unpaid internship. One graduate wrote, "I have been volunteering somewhere that actually made me happy and they've decided to hire me." Another graduate moved with his family from the northeast; he is seeking work in his new home in FL. An alumna cannot work at present due to urgent health issues. It is possible that medical conditions or family circumstances prevent other alumni from current paid employment.

Table 12. Job Placement Services Received by Unemployed Graduates (n=8)

	Alumni (frequency)	Parents (frequency)
Student is not currently seeking employment	1	2
Not receiving any job placement services	0	1
Job placement services through a local employment agency	0	0
Job placement services through vocational rehabilitation or government agency	0	1
Other	0	3

Graduates and their parents were asked about additional education completed after graduating from The Horizons School. The majority had not done so. Seven reported completing a vocational training program or trade school; one completed an educational program offered by a traditional four-year college. One enrolled in, but did not complete a technical college training program.

### **Self-Determination**

Self-determination includes managing one's time and schedule and achieving personal goals. In addition, this domain incorporates planned social outings and community engagement, such as volunteering to help with a personal cause or interest. Time and schedule management are important prerequisites for independent living and paid employment. Horizons students receive regular individual and group support to learn to follow daily schedules, adjusting for illness, holidays and special events.

Thirteen alumni and 27 parents responded to the item, "Who manages your (your student's) daily schedule (work, household responsibilities, social activities, etc.)?" as shown in Table 13. Results indicate graduates assume personal responsibility to set and manage schedules.

Table 13. Responsibility for Managing Daily Schedule (n=40)

	Parents (frequency)	Alumni (frequency)
<b>Set and manage my own schedule</b>	21	11
Family member or friend helps me manage my own schedule	5	2
Person or business is paid to help me manage my own schedule	0	0
My schedule is managed for me by someone else	1	0

Forty alumni and parents indicated how often students engage in social activities with peers as shown in Table 14. The most common response was “three or more times monthly,” indicating graduates are socially connected.

Table 14. Frequency of Socialization with Peers (n=40)

	<i>Alumni (frequency)</i>	<i>Parents (frequency)</i>
<b>Never</b>	2	3
<b>One time per month</b>	0	3
<b>Two times monthly</b>	2	4
<b>Three or more times monthly</b>	7	17
<b>I do not know</b>	2	0

Both groups also reported who is responsible for initiating social plans as shown in Table 15, below. Alumni apparently continue to practice skills learned as Horizons students to plan and implement shared social activities. This is a sign of adult independence.

Table 15. Responsibility for Peer Social Plans (n=38)

	<i>Alumni (frequency)</i>	<i>Parents (frequency)</i>
<b>I make the plans</b>	3	15
<b>My friend(s) and I make plans together</b>	9	8
A friend makes the plans and I just go along with them	0	1
Someone else (family member or a person paid to help me) makes the plans for us	0	2

Alumni and parents reported how graduates keep in touch after leaving Horizons School. The majority talk on the phone or through social media like Facebook. Only six reportedly do not maintain contact with fellow alumni.

When asked whether the student (or graduate) volunteers for a community-based organization to help with a cause of interest, 3 of 14 alumni and 11 of 27 parents responded affirmatively. A variety of organizations and agencies were named that benefit from alumni volunteer service, including Bartlett Adult Day Out Program, Children’s Hospital, Georgia House Rabbit Society, Highland Presbyterian Church, and Incarnation Catholic School. In addition, Merrimack Performing Arts Center, Passion

City Church, St. Peters Church and The Vulcan Park and Museum host Horizons School alumni volunteers.

Table 16. Methods of Alumni Contact (n=40)

<b>Response</b>	<b>Parents (frequency)</b>	<b>Alumni (frequency)</b>
<b>Do not keep in touch with other Horizons students or alumni</b>	5	1
<b>Talks to them on the phone</b>	11	8
<b>Talks to them through social media (such as Facebook)</b>	17	11
<b>Visits them in person whenever possible</b>	8	8
<b>Sends them letters or Emails</b>	0	0

Alumni and parents identified who assists graduates to manage challenging situations. Responses in Table 17, below, reveal the majority rely on relatives or friends to help when facing a difficult circumstance. When asked about effectiveness at attaining personal goal attainment, both groups responded positively as revealed in Table 18. The majority deemed their method of goal attainment as “effective” or “very effective.”

Table 17. Help Managing Challenging Situations (n=40)

	<b>Alumni (frequency)</b>	<b>Parents (frequency)</b>
Needs no assistance	4	1
<b>Receives assistance from family member or friend</b>	7	24
Receives assistance from an agency	0	2
Receives assistance from a counselor, psychiatrist or psychologist	2	0

Table 18. Level of Effectiveness at Achieving Personal Goals (n=40)

	Parents (frequency)	Alumni (frequency)
<b>Very effective</b>	1	6
<b>Effective</b>	20	6
<b>Ineffective</b>	4	1
<b>Very ineffective</b>	2	0

**Overall Satisfaction**

Finally, both groups (alumni and parents) were asked questions about satisfaction with training provided by The Horizons School. Eleven of 14 alumni reported they would recommend the School’s program to other young adults. Graduate parents rated level of satisfaction, considering four abilities. Results in Table 19 indicate a high level of satisfaction among alumni parents, the majority of whom responded “satisfied” or “very satisfied.”

Table 19. Parents Level of Satisfaction with Graduates’ Abilities (n=27)

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
<b>Overall level of self-confidence</b>	12	9	4	1	1
<b>Ability to live independently</b>	12	11	2	1	1
<b>Ability to maintain employment</b>	9	8	6	2	1
<b>Ability to maintain friendships</b>	6	9	10	1	0

Parents were invited to share additional feedback about their graduate’s experience as a Horizons student. Excerpts confirm successful program outcomes. (Graduates’ names were changed to protect privacy.)

- *Horizons was great for Linda. The program gave her skills and confidence she didn't know she could have. She does well, but continuing health issues keep her from working and being more independent. She learned so much at Horizons to be as independent as possible in Houston, a large city. Transportation and social aspects are the biggest challenges.*
- *Myrtice attended Northern Michigan College and went through their dental assisting program. She was not able to pass college-level Algebra to be certified. She now works in food preparation at a luxury residence for seniors. She lives where there is (sic) lots of activities, so she interacts with people all day long.*
- *Other than needing support for money management, Susan pretty well operates on her own. She could be a neater housekeeper.*
- *Latrice flourished during her attendance at The Horizons School. She gained new self-confidence that we had never seen before. Latrice is working part-time and attending a social group for young adults with developmental disabilities (mostly autistic). This group has been very beneficial for her, but does not come close to the social life she had at Horizons.*
- *Horizons is a wonderful place and I would recommend it to anyone in a similar situation.*
- *Bruce is doing well right now! He is working full-time as an assistant to a top-notch plumber and is working to become an apprentice. He is playing for a soccer team in a league for young adults and now has a gym membership and is working out and using it. He still has friends from Horizons and they get together from time to time. He is putting himself out there socially more than before (Horizons). I am proud of him. Thank you, Horizons, for everything!*
- *Horizons did their job well. Harold fought against the experience and, therefore, did not achieve the results we had hoped.*

Alumni were asked to name the most useful skill they learned while at Horizons School. Excerpts from 13 respondents indicate valued skills:

- *I think the most valuable thing I gained at the School was confidence*
- *Social skills and problem solving (2 responses)*
- *Cooking and social skills*
- *Learning the bus (2 responses)*

- *How to be independent and manage my own life, my own money, budget and checkbook (3 similar responses)*
- *I learned how to manage time and scheduling (sic) appointments*

Alumni recalled their favorite part about being a student at The Horizons School.

Excerpts reveal most popular activities and classes, including:

- *The staff members; the majority of teachers and talking with them*
- *Field trips and Field Education (3 similar comments)*
- *Cooking class – improving my skills. I cook on my own and didn't before I went to Horizons School*
- *Learning how to become independent and taking (sic) care of myself*
- *Meeting new people, making new friends*
- *I learned so much that helps me right (now) in my life*

Visit our website for additional Success Stories freely shared by alumni and their families, <http://www.horizonsschool.org/success-stories/>

Positive career and independent living outcomes are a testament to the program and faculty of The Horizons School!

## **Conclusions**

In summary, 42 responses from alumni and parents to confidential online surveys reveal positive outcomes regarding personal confidence and skill acquisition for independent work and community living. The majority of alumni live alone or with a roommate or partner in an apartment or home. Most manage their own bank account, budget and spending, sometimes with help from a trusted relative or friend. All access the community on foot, using public transit, taxis, Uber and riding with relatives.

The majority report self-managing personal health and wellness, including medication and health insurance, scheduling and attending clinical appointments, and reporting health history and symptoms, with occasional help from relatives or friends. Alumni and parents report high levels of independence for eight functional tasks, including maintaining good personal hygiene, planning healthy meals, shopping for groceries, cooking meals, laundering clothes and linens, dressing appropriately for the situation, organizing and cleaning, and practicing home safety.

Most alumni and parents report paid employment, at least part-time, following graduation. Many successfully applied for paid work with minimal assistance. Several received support from a local agency or contractor to obtain employment. Graduates work in a variety of positions across multiple career clusters (Architecture and Construction; Food Service; Personal Care and Services; Educational and Social Services; Plants, Animals and Natural Resources; Retail Services; and Transportation Services). Most have been employed for 7 months or longer. Fourteen of 20 parents and three alumni reported employment has lasted more than one year.

Nearly all alumni and parents said graduates effectively meet personal goals. A majority of graduates set and manage their own daily schedule, including self-care, paid employment and volunteer work. Alumni maintain social connections through phone calls and social media and meet peers for shared activities three or more times monthly. Overall, there is a high level of satisfaction among alumni parents and graduate respondents to this survey!

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**The Horizons School**

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