

Preparing for career without school:

The experiences of home educating families in Australia

How do home educated young people progress from compulsory education to tertiary education and good job or career prospects? How do they do it without a year 12 certificate and the support provided in schools? And how do their parents make sure they are prepared? A recent study asked six home educating parents in QLD and NSW to share their experiences. Between them, these parents had helped 23 young people successfully transition into the working world and further education and training.

What did the parents think was important to transition successfully?

The parents felt it was essential to focus on holistic development, not just education. They felt it was important for their children to be socially capable, participate widely in the community, and be well equipped with the life skills needed to function as adults. Such skills included cooking, budgeting and other life management skills, problem solving, critical thinking, and emotional resilience.

How did they help their child transition to tertiary education and work?

The parents used several strategies to help their child transition. Foremost, they encouraged the young person in autonomous exploration. The parents would look for opportunities for their child to explore their interests. These opportunities might be occasions to learn at a deeper level, such as volunteer in the community or undertake work experience, pursue hobbies or qualifications. If the child was interested, they would choose to pursue that opportunity and the parent would then arrange it. Afterwards, the parent and child would evaluate and continue looking for opportunities either in line with that interest or in line with a new interest. This is called The Opportunity Cycle.

The Opportunity Cycle



Often, community participation required the parent to advocate for their child. They had to research, make calls, write letters, arrange insurance, and overcome other people's concerns about having a young person take part in the opportunity. As the parents learnt to advocate for their child, the young person also learnt from these experiences leading to independence in advocating for themselves. This advocational disposition seemed to be a sign the young person was becoming self-reliant and able to manage their own transition as a young adult.

Interestingly, while the parents would find opportunities, suggest, help evaluate options, and encourage, the young person always made the final decision. Learning to make career decisions and self-advocate for opportunities was integral to the transition experience.

For most of the young people, there was no fully planned 'pathway' mapped out. Parent and child experimented with opportunities as they either naturally arose or were made, would see where it led and evaluated whether the young person remained interested. This approach made the transition less stressful and enabled the young person to pursue multiple opportunities and pathways in different interest areas. It also helped the young person better understand themselves and their career aspirations. Loss of interest and changing pathways was not considered failure, rather, it was evidence of a refining identity and goals.

In summary, a successful home education transition, as demonstrated in these six families, was defined by:

- the young person having plenty of time and autonomy to explore their interests in the wider community,
- supportive parents who helped find opportunities, advocated for their child, and encouraged them to make their own decisions, and
- an approach to their preparation that encompassed not just education, but life skills and character development.

A note on the diversity of pathways taken in this study: The young people usually had plenty of experience engaging in the wider community. Approximately 1/3 started the transition through volunteer/work experience/paid work opportunities, gaining qualifications through and while working. Nearly 1/3 began with TAFE courses, apprenticeships, and traineeships, at times going on to university. And 1/3 started with bridging courses or university units through Open University. Finally, one young person has followed a more entrepreneurial pathway, using qualifications to support their own business development.