

Thinking about Life after School

Leaving school is an exciting transition filled with opportunities, change, and new possibilities. This guide provides pointers to help families support their disabled loved-one into adulthood.



Part 1:

Building the Foundation

Legal Rights and Welfare Guardianship

When a young person turns 18, parents or guardians no longer automatically have legal authority to make decisions for them. If an adult needs support to understand, or communicate important decisions about their life,* the Family Court can appoint a Welfare Guardian under the Protection of Personal and Property Rights (PPPR) Act.

Guardians must act in the person's best interests and involve them in decision-making wherever possible. A Welfare Guardian can make decisions about health care, living arrangements, and personal welfare, but cannot manage finances or property. For more information, see the Parent to Parent Welfare Guardianship resource.

**Even if the person can make simple decisions, a guardian may still be necessary if the person doesn't fully understand the consequences or the complexity of decisions*

Disability Support and NASC

Needs Assessment and Service Coordination (NASC) services help identify disability support needs and connect people with appropriate services.

Leaving school is a major life change and can be a good time to request a new NASC assessment, particularly if it has been several years since the last one. Early contact is recommended, as waiting times can be lengthy. For more information, see the Parent to Parent [An introduction to the NASC resource](#).

Financial Support

Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) provides a range of disability-related financial supports, including:

Disability Allowance: Helps cover ongoing disability-related costs.

Child Disability Allowance: For caregivers of children under 18 who require constant care. This payment is not income-tested.

Supported Living Payment: For people aged 16 and over whose disability significantly limits their ability to work.

WINZ may also offer employment support, job training, community participation services, and transition-to-employment programmes.

Planning the Transition from School

In New Zealand, students are legally required to stay in school until they are 16 years old, although exemptions may be granted in exceptional circumstances.

Students receiving Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) funding can remain at school until the end of the year in which they turn 21.

Whether your young person leaves earlier or stays until 21, transition planning should begin before the final year of school and involve collaboration between family, school staff, and support services.

Helpful tips include:

- > Discuss future goals with school staff early.
- > Use IEP meetings where available.
- > Ask about the school's transition supports and previous successes.
- > Maintain clear and positive communication.
- > Share long-term aspirations so schools can build relevant skills and experiences into learning programmes.

Part 2:

Vision Planning

Starting with Values

A meaningful future starts with understanding what matters most to your young person and family. Values are the beliefs and priorities that guide decisions and shape our lives. Examples include independence, family, friendship, learning, safety, creativity, respect, community, and wellbeing.

Families are encouraged to identify values important to the family and young people should also be encouraged to explore their own values. This helps build self-awareness and supports future goal setting.

Focusing on the School Leaver

Once core values have been identified, families can explore important life areas including:

- Talents and strengths
- Learning and growth
- Relationships
- Community involvement
- Wellbeing and safety
- Independence
- Dreams and aspirations
- Support networks

Housing

Overview of NZ Housing Options

Supported Independent Living (SIL)

People assessed as eligible through NASC may receive support to live independently with visiting or live-in staff assisting with daily living, budgeting, health needs, and community participation.

Supported Housing

Some social housing options combine accessible accommodation with coordinated support services.

Provider-Managed Homes / Residential Houses

Disability providers offer shared homes or individual tenancies with varying levels of support.

Residential housing providers for disabled adults include Spectrum Care, IDEA Services, CCS Disability Action, NZCL, and local community organisations.

Housing should reflect the individual's needs, preferences, strengths, and aspirations. There is no single right solution, and families may need to explore creative and personalised options to achieve the ideal living situation.

Employment

Overview of NZ Employment Initiatives

Available supports for disabled people to achieve meaningful employment include:

- Supported employment providers
- Ministry of Social Development employment programmes
- Apprenticeships and vocational training
- Vocational rehabilitation services
- Employer-led disability initiatives
- Volunteering and internships
- Self-employment and entrepreneurship support

Employment Planning

- Families can consider:
- What type of work interests the young person?
- What strengths and skills do they have?
- What supports or accommodations may be needed?
- Which workplaces, training programmes, or volunteer opportunities could be explored?
- What small steps can be taken now?

Wellbeing

Wellbeing includes physical, emotional, mental, and social health. Supporting wellbeing helps young people build confidence, maintain relationships, and enjoy meaningful lives. Areas to consider include:

Hobbies and Interests

Participation in enjoyable activities can promote confidence, skills, and belonging.

Examples: Art, Music, Technology, Animals, Reading, Volunteering, Gaming, Cooking

Physical Activity

Regular movement supports health and wellbeing.

Examples: Swimming, Walking, Cycling, Dancing, Team sports, Yoga

Social Connections

Strong relationships help people feel connected and supported.

Consider: Friends and family, Clubs and groups, Mentors, Support workers, Community organisations

Reflect on what helps your young person build and maintain meaningful relationships.

Community and Connection

Belonging to a community contributes significantly to quality of life. Planning goals might focus on expanding friendships, joining clubs, volunteering, or participating in local activities.

Further Education and Training

Many providers offer disability support services such as accommodations, assistive technology, mentoring, and tailored learning plans.

When considering further education, think about:

- Interests and career goals
- Preferred learning styles
- Necessary supports or accommodations
- Available courses and providers
- Steps required to access education or training
- Daily routines and schedules

Making a Personal Plan

Future planning works best when it starts with the young person's values, strengths, interests, and dreams.

Successful transition planning is not about fitting into a predetermined system. It is about helping each young person build a life that reflects who they are, what they value, and what brings them purpose, connection, wellbeing, and belonging.

Disclaimer:

The information in this document is for general information purposes only. It is not intended as a thorough and complete guide to an individual's specific situation. Reasonable care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information in this document, which is reviewed regularly. If you have any questions, please contact:

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