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Day of Scholarship

Fall 2023

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Oct 25th, 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

## Institutional Impact of the BUILD Program: Postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities

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### Recommended Citation

Lindell, Mary; Daniels, Jessica; and Wolkerstorfer, Jodi, "Institutional Impact of the BUILD Program: Postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities" (2023). *Day of Scholarship*. 52.  
<https://spark.bethel.edu/dayofscholarship/fall2023/oct25/52>

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# The Institutional Impact of the BUILD Program

Jessica Daniels, PhD, Mary Lindell, PhD, Jodi Wolkerstorfer, MA

**Research Design:** Institutional Case Study; interviews with 22 participants: administrators, faculty, staff, and traditional students; collaborative coding and analysis

## Theoretical Framework: Experimental Social Innovation and Dissemination (ESID) (Fairweather, 1967)

### Identify and Understand a Specific Problem

- Problem:**
- Limited access to postsecondary education for people with intellectual disabilities (ID)
  - People with and without disabilities who attend college have improved quality-of-life outcomes
  - People with ID are least likely among their peers without disabilities and/or students with other disabilities to attend college
  - Particularly in the Midwest, the traditional student enrollment pool is dramatically shrinking

### Develop an Intervention to Address the Problem

- Intervention/Solution:**
- University president, cabinet and board of trustees decided to extend the opportunity of a Bethel education to students with ID
  - Mixed program: Students in BUILD live, work, and take classes with traditional student peers while also taking BUILD-specific classes focused on enhancing independent living skills
  - Students in BUILD are integrated across campus activities

### Implement the Innovation

- Implementation:**
- Bethel began the BUILD program in 2017 to welcome students with ID to an integrated residential college experience
  - Implementation differed by employee status (i.e., faculty, staff, administrator)
  - Implementation continues to evolve and improve over time
  - (Employee)76 graduates from the BUILD program to date
  - Currently 28 students in the BUILD program
  - Traditional students serve as housing, internship, and academic mentors

### Evaluate the Impact of the Innovation

- Findings and Implications:**
- Minute and mundane experiences and decisions accumulated to significant impact across the university
- “Our experience grew our capacity” (Employee)
- Individuals**
- “...(it’s) not necessarily big, defining moments, but small, little moments throughout. I think it kind of all adds up and creates one big memorable moment.” (Student)
  - “I feel like my college experience would be incomplete if I went to a university that didn’t have students with special needs.” (Student)
- Systems**
- “sometimes it was like trying to put a square peg in a round hole ... it just meant we had to rethink some of the ways that we were doing things.” (Employee)
- Culture**
- “layers of impact” (Employee)
- I didn’t give enough thought to how good it would be for our Bethel community and how it would prompt us to look at a lot of the things that we did, and to make changes in ways that would benefit our students in general.” (Administrator)
  - Bethel has become a kinder place,” is more “mutually encouraging, and has a “lightheartedness and positivity” (Various participants)

### Disseminate the Results

- Publications & Presentations:**
- Daniels, J, Lindell, M., & Wolkerstorfer, J. (2023, November). *The institutional impact of the BUILD program: Postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities*. ASHE Conference. Minneapolis, MN.
  - Lindell, M., (submitted). *Quality-of-Life Characteristics of Individuals with ID Entering a Residential College Program*. Inclusion.
  - Lindell, M. & Daniels, J. (2022, July). *A residential college experience for individuals with intellectual disabilities*. IASE Conference. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
  - Lindell, M., Daniels, J. & Michener, M. (2021). *The Lived Experience of College Students with Intellectual Disabilities*. Journal of the International Association of Special Education, 21(1), 34-45.







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