

# Transport and community services key for sociable Down syndrome adults

February 6 2015, by Rebecca Graham

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Young adults with Down syndrome are more likely to be social depending on their access to public transport and cultural and religious services rather than social factors like their relationships with other people, according to recent research.

The study is one of the first to explore environmental influences, both physical and social, as a means of identifying facilitators and barriers to

the young adults' community participation.

Telethon Kids Institute Head of Child Disability Research Professor Helen Leonard and her colleague Dr Kitty-Rose Foley say so far research has focused on the impairment of everyday functioning and increased medical challenges of people with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities.

"However, we believe participation in their community depends not only on their ability to function, but also on the responsiveness of the community and environment to their needs," Prof Leonard says.

The research team utilised data from 166 WA Down syndrome 'Needs Opinions Wishes' (NOW) questionnaires, completed by parents of young adults aged between 16-32 years.

The NOW questionnaires assessed [social participation](#), including level of accomplishment in daily activities and type of assistance required and environmental factors to identify physical and social facilitators and barriers.

These environmental measures included social support and attitudes, government and public services, equal opportunities and political orientations, physical environment, and accessibility and technology.

"Young people with Down syndrome were reported to have more difficulty participating in social roles [relationships, community life, and recreation] than they did participating in daily activities [personal care, communication, and housing]," Dr Foley says.

## **Workplace and attitudes influence social participation**

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Facilitators to participation included family and close friends, the young person's current workplace, and the attitudes of superiors and colleagues.

While barriers included lack of support from friends, negative attitudes of strangers, and availability of jobs and [public transport](#).

The researchers say these barriers have great potential to be modified.

They suggest public campaigns to increase knowledge and awareness; changes to public transport systems to increase accessibility, and policy changes to increase job availability for people with intellectual disabilities.

Prof Leonard and Dr Foley say greater understanding of how we can improve community participation of this group is needed.

"Future research could include the young people themselves," Professor Leonard says.

**More information:** Foley K-R, Girdler S, Bourke J, Jacoby P, Llewellyn G, et al. (2014) "Influence of the Environment on Participation in Social Roles for Young Adults with Down Syndrome." *PLoS ONE* 9(9): e108413. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0108413](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0108413)

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