

Residential Immersive Life Skills (RILS) Programs

Transitions, Recreation & Life Skills Services
Stephanie Di Martino, CTRS & Michelle Halliday, R/TRO



Session outline & learning objectives



What are Residential Immersive Life Skills (RILS) Programs?



A look inside RILS Programs



Life Skills Program Guide to support evidence-based practice



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What are Residential Immersive Life Skills (RILS) Programs?

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A world of possibility



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Transitioning to adult life

- The journey toward adulthood can be difficult for young people with disabilities.
- They have the same aspirations as peers but may struggle to achieve their goals.
- They often lack critical opportunities to develop life skills and peer relationships.



What are RILS programs?

Each program is different, but there are some **essential features**

- An overnight, away-from-home program lasting 2 to 3 weeks
- Designed for small groups of youth with disabilities (aged 14 to 21)
- Youth work towards personal goals
- Group learning activities combined with social experiences

The goal is to assist youth to develop critical life skills and mindsets that will support their **transition to adulthood**

A Look Inside RILS Programs at Holland Bloorview

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A world of possibility



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Transition Preparedness:

Away-from-home life skills programs can transform youth

Youth Weekend Retreat
2 nights 3 days

The Independence Program
3 weeks



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Youth Weekend Retreat

Youth Weekend Retreat is designed to support independent experiences. It is an opportunity for youth with disabilities to come together for a weekend of specialized programming including life skills strategies, cooking, recreational activities, and social opportunities.

Length: 2 nights 3 days

Location: WindReach Farm

Ages: 16-21

Cost: \$310



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Youth Weekend Retreat: Example Schedule

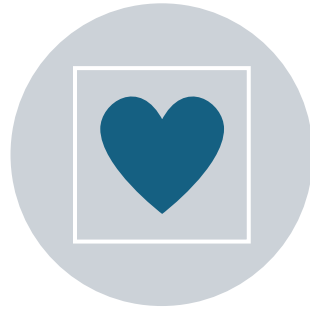
Friday February 9 th , 2024	Saturday February 10 th , 2024	Sunday February 11 th , 2024
<h1>YWR Youth Schedule</h1>	8:30 am - 9:30am > Breakfast	8:00am - 9:00am > Breakfast
	10:00am- 11:30am Tour the grounds & livestock	9:00am - 9:30am Packing up
	FREE TIME/BREAK 11:30am- 11:45am	10:00am - 11:00am Return to Holland Bloorview
	11:45pm – 1:00pm > Lunch	11:00am – 11:45am > Reassessment of goals & SNACKS
	1:00pm - 2:00pm Team Building and Getting Active	12:00pm PICK UP
	2:00pm - 3:30pm Farm Wool Activity	
	FREE TIME/BREAK 3:30pm-4:00pm	
	4:00pm - 5:00pm Stress and Coping Workshop	
	5:00pm - 7:00pm > Dinner	
	FREE TIME/BREAK 7:00pm-7:30pm	
3:00pm – 4:00pm Welcomes, tour and unpack		
4:00pm-5:00pm Ice breaker games		
5:00pm – 7:00pm > Dinner	7:30pm - 8:30pm Get ready for the party	
7:00pm-7:30pm Clean up/Break		
7:30pm – 9:00 pm Get-to-know YOU activities!	8:30pm Party!	
9:00pm - 11:00pm Movie & Games! In rooms by 11pm	In rooms by 11pm	



Using Youth Weekend Retreat to Determine Readiness



LEVEL OF
MOTIVATION



EMOTIONAL
READINESS



PARTICIPATION
OBSERVATIONS



COLLABORATIVE
DECISIONS



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The Independence Program (TIP)

Program Dates: Sunday, July 28 – Friday August 16

Location: Seneca College – Newnham Campus

Ages: 17-21

Cost: \$1800 plus \$250 spending money



Welcome Session





















Clients, families/caregivers attend a welcome session at Seneca College 1 month prior to the start of program.

The half day session includes:

- meet and greet with peers and families
- opportunity to meet the team and ask questions
- youth Session
- parent Session
- tour of the campus



TIP:
Example
Schedule
Week 1


















	Sunday 28	Monday 29	Tuesday 30	Wednesday 31	Thursday 1	Friday 2	Saturday 3
8:30-9:45	Arrival	BREAKFAST					
10:00-12:00	Between 2:00-4:00 --- Welcome & Introductions 4:00pm 	Orientation Part 2/Goal Review --- Care Routine Check In	Campus Scavenger Hunt & Community Safety 	Public Transit, Mapping & Navigation  --- City Mobility Prep	City Mobility  --- Arrange Travel	Goal Check In & Budget Check In 	The Art of Laundry 
12:00-2:00	Orientation Part 1 --- Pizza Time 	LUNCH					
1:00-2:30 (Staff)	---	Meeting	Meeting	Meeting	Meeting		
2:00-2:30 (Youth)	Care Routine --- Get to know the campus	Nutrition & Meal Planning 	Groceries 	TTC Scavenger Hunt 	City Mobility  --- Arrange Travel	Ability in Action (Variety Village) 	Saturday To-Do's and Goal Practice 
4:30-7:00		DINNER					
7:00-9:00		Budgeting for groceries and spending money 	Money Skills 	Dinner Out... 	Stress & Coping 	FREE TIME 	City Survival Planning Part 1 



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TIP:
Example
Schedule
Week 2
















	Sunday 4	Monday 5	Tuesday 6	Wednesday 7	Thursday 8	Friday 9	Saturday 10
8:30-9:45	BREAKFAST						
10:00-12:00	Meal Planning 	Civic Holiday Sleep In! 	City Survival #1 	City Survival Planning Part 1 	Money Skills 	Goal Check In & Budget Check In 	Saturday To-Do's and Goal Practice 
12:00-2:00	LUNCH						
1:00-2:30 (Staff) 2:00-2:30 (Youth)				Meeting		Meeting	
2:30-4:30	Grocery Shopping 		City Survival #1 	Goal Practice 	Afternoon at the Movies 	Mindfulness Workshop ----- City Survival Planning Part 2	Jays Game (Leave at 1:00pm) 
4:30-7:00	DINNER						
7:00-9:00	City Survival Planning Part 2 ----- Social Activities	Free Day! 	Free Time 	Dating, Relationships & Sexuality	Social Skills 	All about me 	Free Time 



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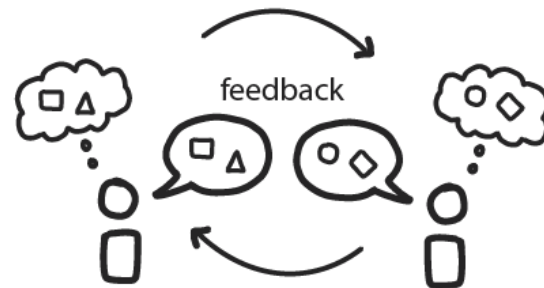
TIP:
Example
Schedule
Week 3

	Sunday 11	Monday 12	Tuesday 13	Wednesday 14	Thursday 15	Friday 16
8:30-9:45	BREAKFAST					
10:00-12:00	Meal Planning 	City Survival 	Ahoy Matey! Adapted Sailing 	Goal Practice --- 	Wrap Up – Goals, Feedback, Packing 	Farewell (Snacks & Refreshments) (10:00am-11:30am) <i>Goodbye!</i>
12:00-2:00	LUNCH					
1:00-2:30 (Staff)				Meeting	Meeting	
2:00-2:30 (Youth)						
2:30-4:30	Groceries 	City Survival 	Ahoy Matey! Adapted Sailing 	Recreation and Leisure Exploration 	Wrap Up – Goals, Feedback, Packing 	
4:30-7:00	DINNER					
7:00-9:00	Party Planning 	Free Time 	Free Time 	Debrief and Reflections 	Final Party 	



Parent Testimonials

“We are so grateful to Holland Bloorview and all the programs. I remember signing my son for his first group program and thinking he wasn’t ready. 10 years later I look back and see how far he has come. From not being ready for a small weekly group to spending 3 weeks away from home. He’s built so many important skills and met so many people along the way”.



Residential programs are facilitated by an interdisciplinary team

- Clinical Operations Manager
- Team Leads
- Occupational Therapists
- Occupational Therapist Assistants
- Therapeutic Recreation Specialists
- Therapeutic Recreation Assistants
- Life Skill Coaches
- Enhanced Externs (Nursing Students)
- Social Worker
- Nurses
- Youth Facilitator/ Youth Mentor
- Students & Volunteers





Program activities and environments are designed to:

- Build confidence and self-efficacy
- Let youth make their own choices (autonomy and self-determination)
- Help youth understand their strengths and capabilities
- Motivate them to overcome future obstacles
- Develop new notions of independence and interdependence
- Encourage youth to ask for help and advocate for their needs
- Establish a greater awareness of what is possible for their future

The program is tailored to clients goals



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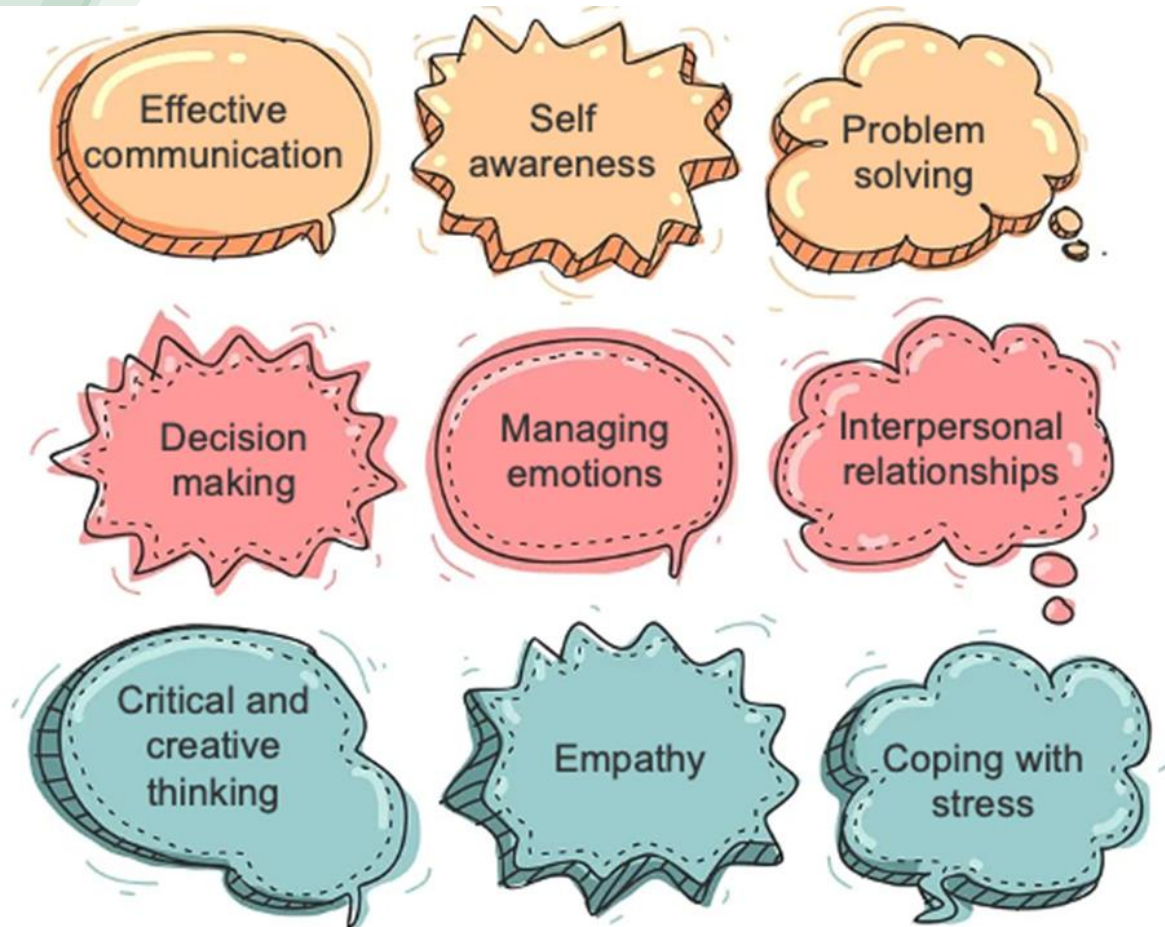
A client-centred approach: Goals

- Prior to program clients and families meet with a staff to complete goal setting
- Everyone will be assigned a goal lead at program
- Weekly goal check in and designated time to practice



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**Life skills
exposure can
be impactful**

Different Learning Styles

Classroom



- More formal workshops to address foundational work

Experiential



- Going out and trying what has been learned in the workshop in real life ex. Cooking, Budgeting, Transit, Friendships, Organization

Unexpected



- When life happens: losing a bank card, lost on transit, running late, strangers, friendships/relationships, adapted devices



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Service Model Style

- Empowerment
- Different ways people do things need to explore, fail, trial and error etc.
- Try to support staff not to do things so fast
- How the community may perceive us by not jumping in to help right away
- Importance of calculated risk taking, learning from mistakes



TIP Photos



Participation can be life changing

“I would say out of the whole experience, **she came back a different kid**. She came back confident... almost like a take charge kinda personality... I didn't think anybody could change in [X] days like that, but they can...Yeah, she's definitely got more confidence, she's got more... just direction.”

~ Parent



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Programs are designed to provide immediate benefits

Although each youth arrives with different strengths and needs, most RILS participants rapidly develop targeted skills and mindsets.

These **foundational benefits** include:

- Acquisition of new life skills
- Greater awareness of future possibilities
- Knowledge of strengths and weaknesses
- Friendship and sense of belonging
- Enhanced self-confidence and empowerment

Free time and after-hours social experiences

Learning through **social interaction**

- Unstructured time with peers
- Learn about oneself, and others
- Sense of belonging
- Friendship
- Sense of community
- Interpersonal dynamics



Unstructured Time

I would say the moment that kinda changed everything for me was ... we all went to the movies as, like, an outing, and we all watched movies and had dinner together, and then we talked outside while we were waiting for [accessible transit] for just over an hour... It's crazy how much you get to know people in just an hour, like I saw everyone in a whole different light. ... I just **talked to people on a whole other level** than I've talked to anyone else in my whole life.

~ Youth



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Blast from the past

T.I.P. has been in operation for over 30 years. It was originally based within the Centre (Ontario Crippled Children's Centre) and in 1992 made its move into the community

In total 322 clients have graduated from The Independence Program

1992 - 1993
Glendon College, York University
1994 - 1997
Toronto Metropolitan (formally known as Ryerson Polytechnic Institute)
1998 - 2001
Innis Residence, University of Toronto
2002 - 2015
Toronto Metropolitan
2016 - 2019
Seneca College
2022
George Brown College
2023 - Present
Seneca College

MONDAY, FEB. 25, 1963 -

New Project Gives Taste of Apartment Living to Handicapped Teen-agers

By MARY E. JAMES

A project to prepare handicapped teen-agers for life on their own is being launched by Bloorview Hospital, Home and School. The new plan not only provides training in handling home equipment, but

also an apartment unit in which the children will live during training.

Two children will live in the apartment at a time. They will do their own work, buy and cook their own food, learn to budget. The apartment is a

standard one, making no allowances for the children's handicaps.

The project was set up by Bloorview authorities in consultation with therapy and nursing staffs, the physiatrist (a medical-physical expert),

and of course, the school staff. It will be integrated into the regular routine of Bloorview. This includes medical treatment and therapy, and school work under the Board of Education, which supplies the teachers and the recreational

and cultural activities complete to round out Bloorview's program for the total care of the handicapped child. Students must leave at 17 years of age.

Most of the older children have already learned to cook in the training kitchen; but the "hard kitchen," as the children call it, in the new apartment has none of its helps. It has the ordinary level sink and stove, instead of at wheel-chair level, high cupboards and low storage compartments with stationary shelves (instead of the pull-out or revolving variety).

"After all, this is what they will be likely to find in the average apartment or house," remarked Jennie Palycia, coordinator of the therapy department at Bloorview.

The potential housekeeper must be expert in the operation of her wheelchair — and most of the children at Bloorview are amazingly so. And she must be nimble with her "reachers" — a long-handled, pincer-type gadget of which there are several kinds on the market. Bloorview has deliberately selected an inexpen-

sive one since "handicapped teen-agers on their own for the first time would not be likely to have much money."

Manoeuvring her wheelchair into the most strategic position, the handicapped child with her reachers can get the box of cereal from the highest shelf, pull out the cooking utensil from the innermost recesses of the pots-and-pans cupboard, turn on the sink taps which she probably cannot reach from her chair — even operate the elements of the rather old-fashioned-looking electric stove.

If she cannot manage to reach the sink from wheelchair height (depending upon the nature of her handicap), she can take the dishes and a pan of water to the table and complete the dish-washing operation there. And so the kitchen program gets off to a good start.

The airy bedroom is an attractive blue and white room with comfortable-looking beds and the usual furniture and equipment for two. The bathroom also is the normal set-up, the only concession made to its handicapped occupants being that the door between bedroom and bathroom has been replaced by a curtain.

"It would be physically impossible otherwise to manipulate a wheelchair here without help," explained Miss Palycia.

Training is given in six stages, the stay in the apartment varying from two days

and two nights to a week. Each stage requires the occupants to do a little more for themselves and take an increasing responsibility in the ordering of supplies and handling of money, explained Mrs. Sue Harkness, senior therapist. Main meals, for instance, are taken with the rest of the children in the earlier stages.

Monday is shopping day. Supplies are bought by the children at a neighborhood store, a therapist going along to carry the parcels. If weather does not permit going out, supplies are ordered by phone and delivered. Lists have to be carefully prepared "as there must be no borrowing of a forgotten egg or anything else from the kitchen." A limited wardrobe for the

stay in the apartment must also be carefully packed since "there is no going back to the rooms for forgotten articles."

Apartment rules specify that the young tenants must get themselves up, washed, dressed, breakfast over and beds made in time for school and lights out at night at a specified time—all this checked by supervisors who keep a watchful eye on the children at all times.

Kitchen rules stipulate that all dishes, pots and pans and other utensils used must be thoroughly washed and returned to proper places and the kitchen floor must be mopped or swept after each cooking session. Baking soda is to be kept near the stove as a precaution against small fires from spattering fat or other inflammables.

Four lightweight fire extinguishers have been installed at wheelchair height in the walls.

Living in the apartment is presented to the children as a privilege for which they must train and qualify. Tenants must be 13 years and over, with boys and girls likely to leave Bloorview soonest given the preference.

*The Globe and Mail
25 February 1963*

Life Skills Program Guide to support evidence-based practice

Transitions, Recreation and Life Skills



Life Skills Program Guide



Designing and Delivering Residential Immersive Life Skills (RILS) Programs for Youth with Disabilities:

An evidence-based guide for service providers



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The Ontario Independence Program Research team, in partnership with Evidence to Care, has created this evidence-based guide for service providers. It summarizes a decade of research into best practices and key ingredients for effective life skills programs.

This guide offers information and tools to help with the design and delivery of life skills programs.

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Life Skills Program Guide

Who is this guide for?

Individuals or service providers who design and/or deliver RILS and related life skills programs for youth with disabilities may find this guide helpful.

Service providers may include but are not limited to [1]:

- Occupational therapists
- Therapeutic recreation specialists
- Life skills coaches
- Physical therapists
- Social workers
- Nurses
- Personal support workers
- Caregiving attendants
- Youth mentors

This guide may also be valuable for others including policy and decision makers.



Life Skills Program Guide

This 22 page evidence-based guide will:

- Explain the structure and purpose of RILS programs
- Outline how RILS programs may influence youth, parents, and service providers
- Identify the essential components and approaches used in effective RILS programs
- Showcase reflections from youth, parents and staff who have participated in RILS programs
- Provide tools and resources to support RILS program design and delivery

Summary of the guide



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How to get access to the guide

Downloads



Life Skills Program Guide

This guide offers information and tools to help with the design and delivery of life skills programs. It explains the structure and purpose of immersive, away-from-home programs, and summarizes research on essential components and effective approaches. The guide also showcases reflections from youth, parents, and staff who have experienced these programs.

Life Skills Program Guide

<https://hollandbloorview.ca/research-education/knowledge-translation-products/life-skills-program-guide>



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Video Testimonial

Your support makes
Holland Bloorview
more than a hospital

The Independence Program

Holland Bloorview

Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation



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How to access TRLS Programs

1. Referral to the Transitions, Recreation and Life Skills service (self, internal or external)
2. Complete a 90min intake appointment (onsite/virtual)
3. Identify a priority goal area and be motivated to work on it
4. Placed on our waitlist



<https://hollandbloorview.ca/services/programs-services/transitions/life-skills>

Thank you!



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Media Coverage



Released April 27 2022

<https://www.thestar.com/local-toronto-north-york/news/2022/04/27/holland-bloorview-program-helped-prepare-student-for-life-after-high-school.html>

Globe and Mail Summer 2019

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-is-this-the-right-direction-a-toronto-program-helps-youth-with/>



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