



*Preparing young adults with learning difficulties for an independent life*

## **2019 Horizons School Survey of Alumni and Families**

### **Background and Purpose**

The Horizons School is licensed by the Alabama State Department of Education to provide a non-degree post-secondary curriculum for young adults with learning disabilities. Students pursue career or college preparation and acquire new skills for lifelong vocational and living independence. Goal setting and problem solving are addressed across all areas. During the academic year 2018-19, the School commemorated its 27<sup>th</sup> year of serving students and families!

The Horizons School evaluates program outcomes, seeking perspectives of consumers (alumni and families). Emails, web posts and phone calls during the spring of 2019 yielded responses from alumni and families from the past five years. All respondents chose to respond online and not by phone or using a paper survey. The purpose was to solicit feedback about program effectiveness and student outcomes. This report summarizes highlights of responses from 13 alumni and 20 parents.

## **Methods**

Brief surveys were developed by Horizons School administrators, faculty and staff using Survey Monkey. Draft survey items were pretested with currently enrolled students who are not included in the survey sample. Minor wording changes improved comprehension. Electronic and personal invitations with survey links were sent to alumni from the past five years and their parents.

Alumni and parents were invited to respond to a confidential survey online, request a paper copy or respond via phone. Parallel forms elicited perspectives of former students and their parents to demographic items, and items about successful employment and independent living.

## **Results**

Thirteen alumni completed surveys summarizing student achievements, current residence, employment, volunteer service and self-determination. A second survey with parallel items was completed by 20 parents/guardians completed surveys. This report presents data from completed alumni and parent surveys, comparing responses to similar items across groups. In a few cases, parents and alumni responded from the same family. Results are presented in four sections:

### **Demographics, Career Independence, Community Independence and Overall Satisfaction.**

#### **Demographics – Alumni & Parents**

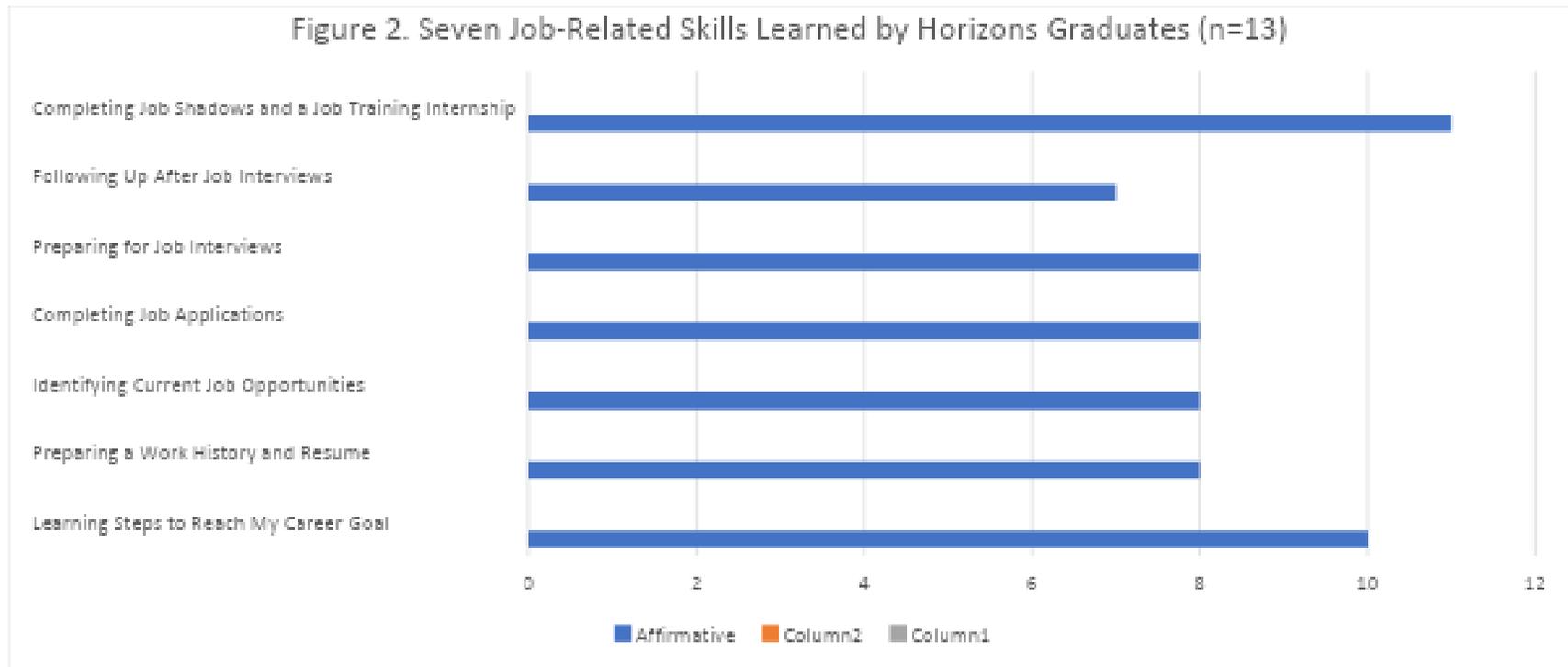
The academic abilities of students served by the Horizons School range from elementary to post-high school competencies. Common challenges include impulsivity, distractibility, poor executive functioning skills (time management and planning abilities), difficulties multi-tasking, and sustaining reciprocal friendships. All are Non-IDEA students who are

ages 18 years and older. All have learning disabilities, such as ADD, AD/HD, ASD, expressive or receptive language disorders and score below average in intelligence predominantly borderline IQ range. Many have multiple diagnoses, for instance a learning disability and anxiety or mood disorder.

Thirteen alumni completed the graduate survey. Three graduated in 2016 or before, one in 2017, four in 2018 and five in 2019. In addition, 20 parents of alumni completed a survey of parallel items. Seven of these reported their adult child completed the Horizons learning program in 2014 or before, seven graduated in 2015 or 2016, and seven graduated in 2017 or later.

### **Career Independence**

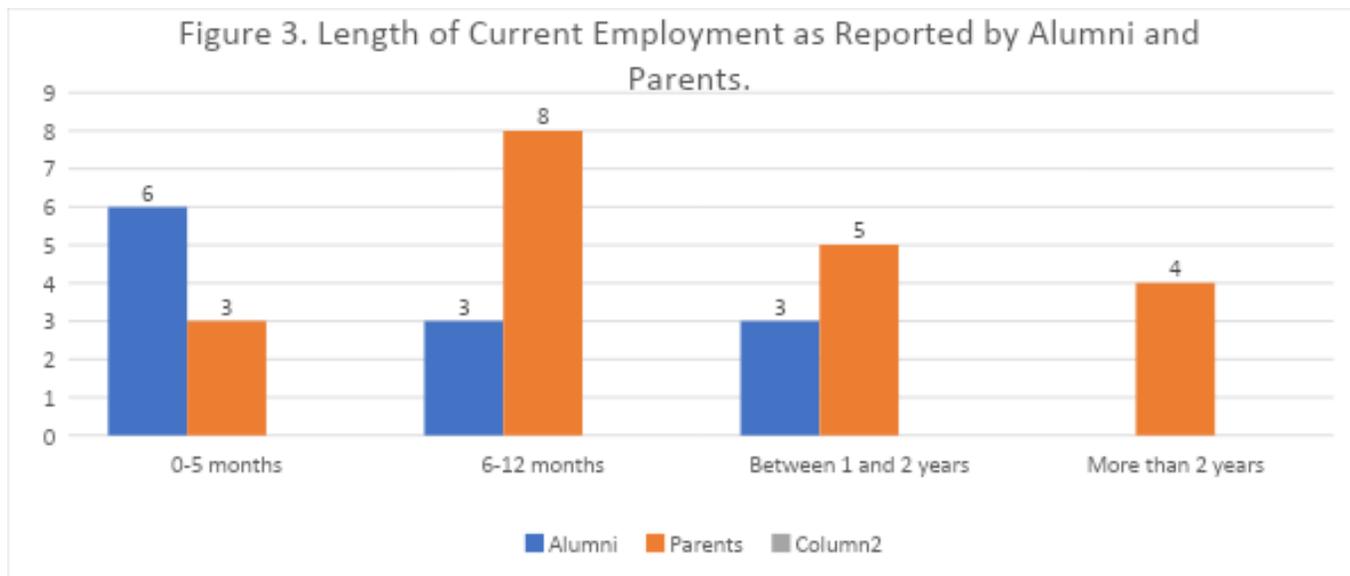
Pre-placement training, learning to identify and apply for paid work, practicing job interviews, and placement assistance are part of the Horizons School READI Learning Program. Graduates rated seven job-related skills they learned from Horizons staff as shown below in Figure 2. Five alumni respondents obtained a paid job while a Horizons student. Nine parents said their adult child obtained paid work while enrolled at Horizons. The remainder received support to transition to paid employment following graduation.



Eight alumni work a part-time job for wages 30 or fewer hours per week; none reported full-time employment. Of those not currently employed for wages, four work as a community volunteer or student intern. They continue practicing vocational skills following program completion. Thirteen of 20 parents reported their adult child works a part-time job for wages and three reported full-time work (31 or more hours weekly). According to parent respondents, the remaining (four) work as a community volunteer or student intern.

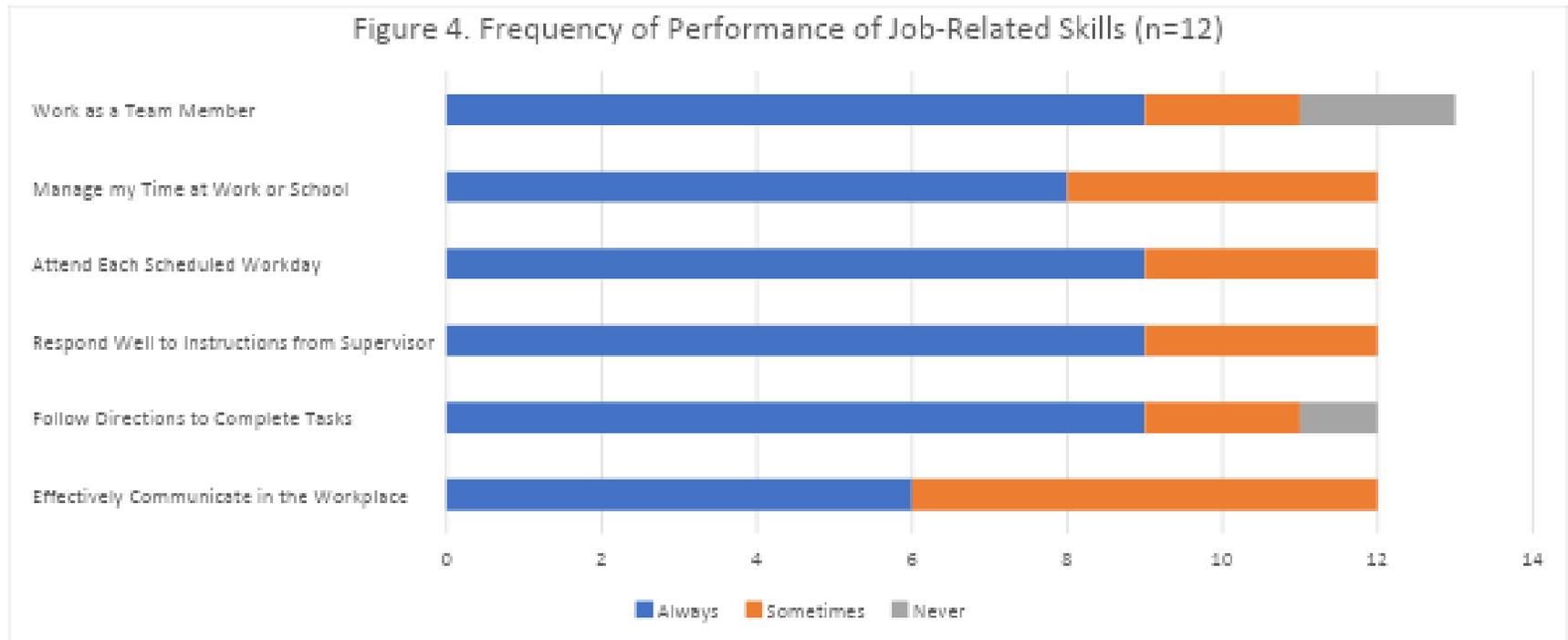
Six alumni report working for wages in their current position for five months or fewer. An equal number has been employed for wages for six months or longer as shown below in Figure 3. Considering parent responses, three of 20 reported their graduate has worked in a current position for wages lasting five months or fewer. The majority (17) reported their adult child has worked the same position for six months or longer!

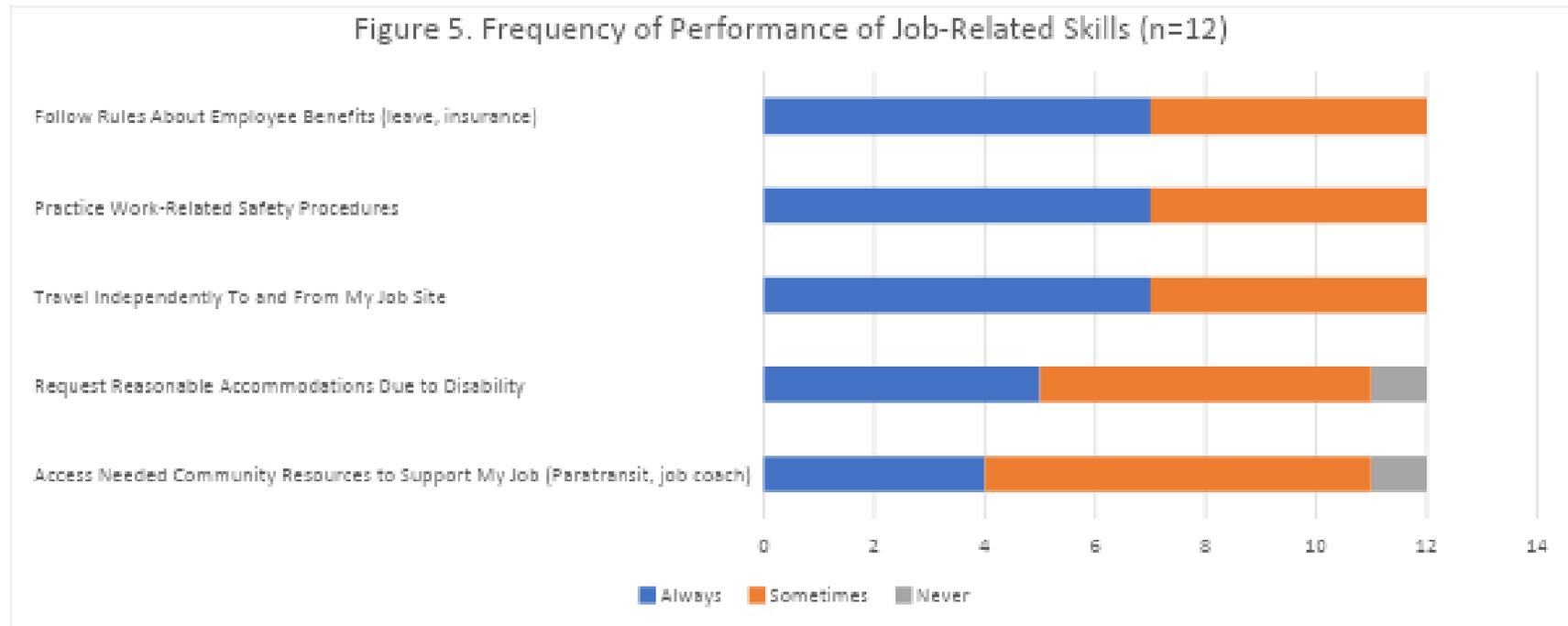
Six program completers feel “very satisfied” with their current job or school program and four feel “satisfied.” Additionally, two feel “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” with their current work position. Eighteen of 20 parents report satisfaction with their graduates current job or school program. Two felt “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” with current job placement.



Twelve Horizons alumni rated the frequency with which they perform 11 important job skills taught within the READI Learning Program as shown in Figures 4 & 5. These skills include

working as a team member, responding well to instructions from a supervisor, attending each scheduled workday, following directions to complete tasks, and others.





Twenty parents responded to an open-ended item, “What is the most useful employment skill your student learned while at the Horizons School?” Responses were grouped and reported by type: *Dependability and Managing Time* (6 responses), *Social and Communication Skills* (5 responses), *Self-Confidence*, and *Following Instructions* (3 responses each), and *Job Search*, *Transportation*, *Dress/Appearance*, and *Teamwork* (1 response each). Sample responses illustrate parent identification of employee skills:

- They have learned to “be punctual, responsible, appropriately dressed and always do your best.”

- They show “good work ethic and dependability.”
- Learned “how to ask questions when needed and be more independent.”
- How to “perform a thorough job and ask for help if needed.”
- “Improved communication skills to better understand coworkers and avoid quitting a position because of miscommunication.”

Alumni and parent respondents reported other education and training programs in which they enrolled while a Horizons student. Three students pursued job training certificates and four enrolled in community college courses for academic credit while a Horizons student. Seven alumni and two parents reported pursuit of other education and training programs following Horizons program completion (one enrolled in a 2-year college program, one enrolled in a 4-year college program and seven pursued specific job training certification). Parents reported their graduates’ long-term employment goals. The most common responses were to obtain full-time employment with benefits and to maintain their current job.

Parents reported their Horizons graduates’ most important work achievements. Subjective responses were grouped by type and reported by frequency: *Maintaining Long-term Employment* (9 responses), *Learning New Job Skills* (4 responses), *Managing Mood and Behavior*, *Achieving Personal Satisfaction*, and *Earning a Promotion or Raise* (3 responses each). Sample responses illustrate parents’ satisfaction:

- “She has held a job for over a year and successfully interviewed on her own for an internship at a non-profit.”
- Maintained “long-term employment with great positive feedback.”

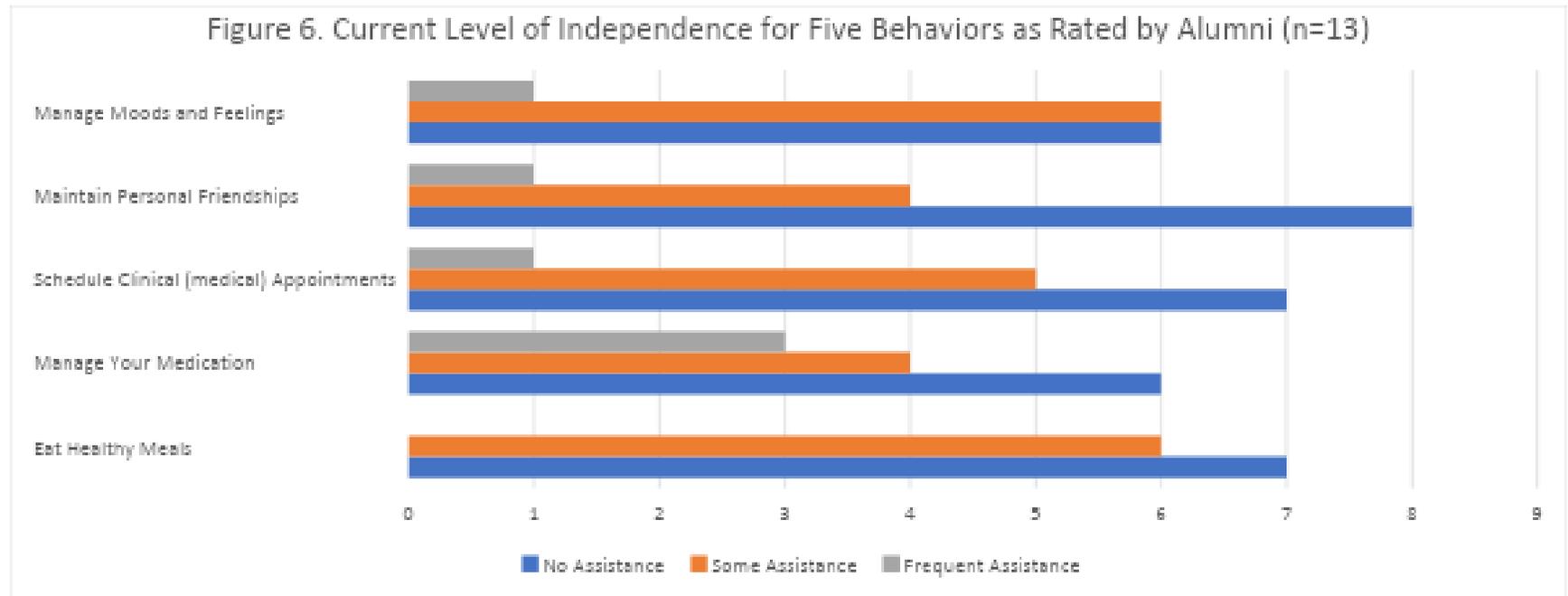
- Earned “employee of the year”
- Learned how to “maintain the job and is working toward managing his mood everyday.”

### **Community Independence**

Horizons students move from supported residence in Terrace Court Apartments (Years 1 & 2), to independent community living with staff site visits (Transition Program in Year 3). Graduates and their parents were asked to report the type of residence and with whom they live. Six program completers live alone in a community residence and six reside with a roommate or partner. Only one returned to live with parents or another relative following graduation. All (13) alumni responded affirmatively to the item, “The Horizons School prepared me for independent living.”

Parents also indicated residence status of Horizons graduates. Three reported their adult child lives alone in a community residence, nine program completers live with a roommate or partner, and eight reside with a parent or other family member. Seventeen of 20 agreed that “The Horizons School prepared my student for independent living.”

Thirteen program completers rated their level of independence for 10 essential work readiness behaviors taught within the READI Learning Program as shown in Figures 6 & 7. Consistent practice of these behaviors enables employment success, for instance, dressing appropriately in clean clothing and managing daily maintenance medication. Independence was operationally defined as *No Assistance* means Independence, *Some Assistance* means occasional help is needed, and *Frequent Assistance* means hands-on or step-by-step instruction is needed.



Twenty parents of Horizons program completers rated their adult child’s level of independence for 10 essential work readiness behaviors taught within the READI Learning Program as shown in Figures 8 & 9.

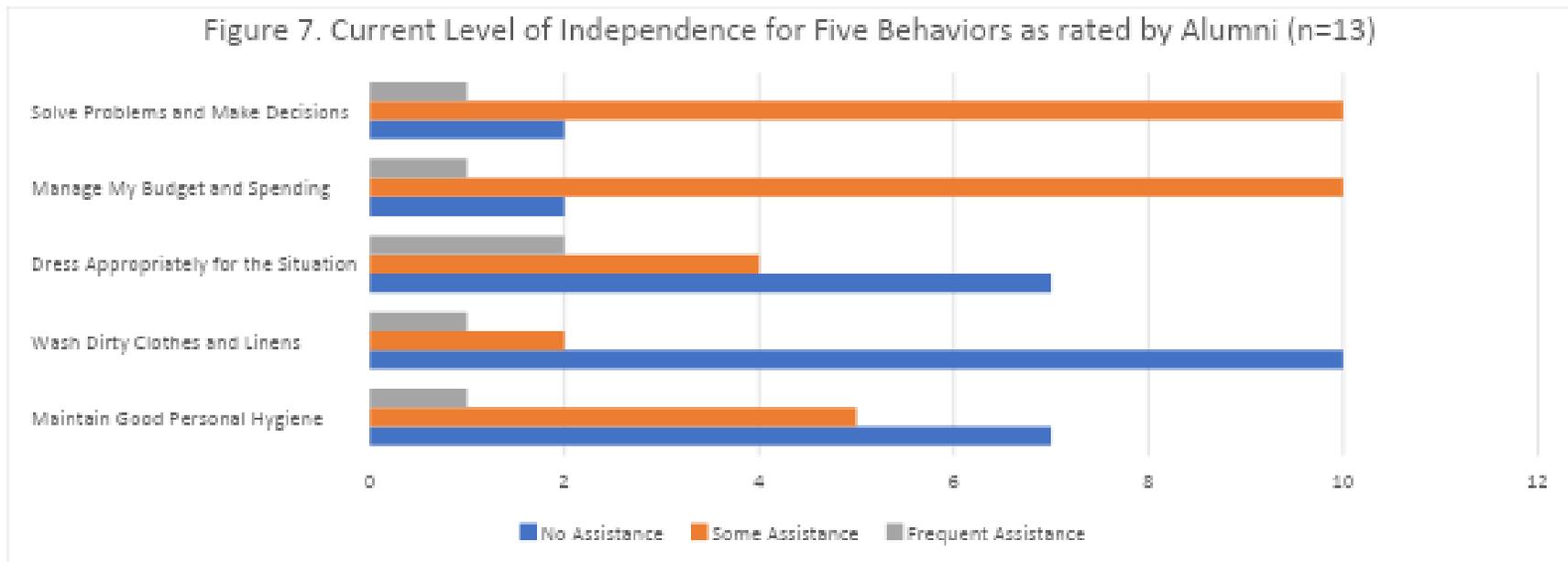


Figure 8. Current Level of Independence for Five Behaviors as Rated by Parents (n=20)

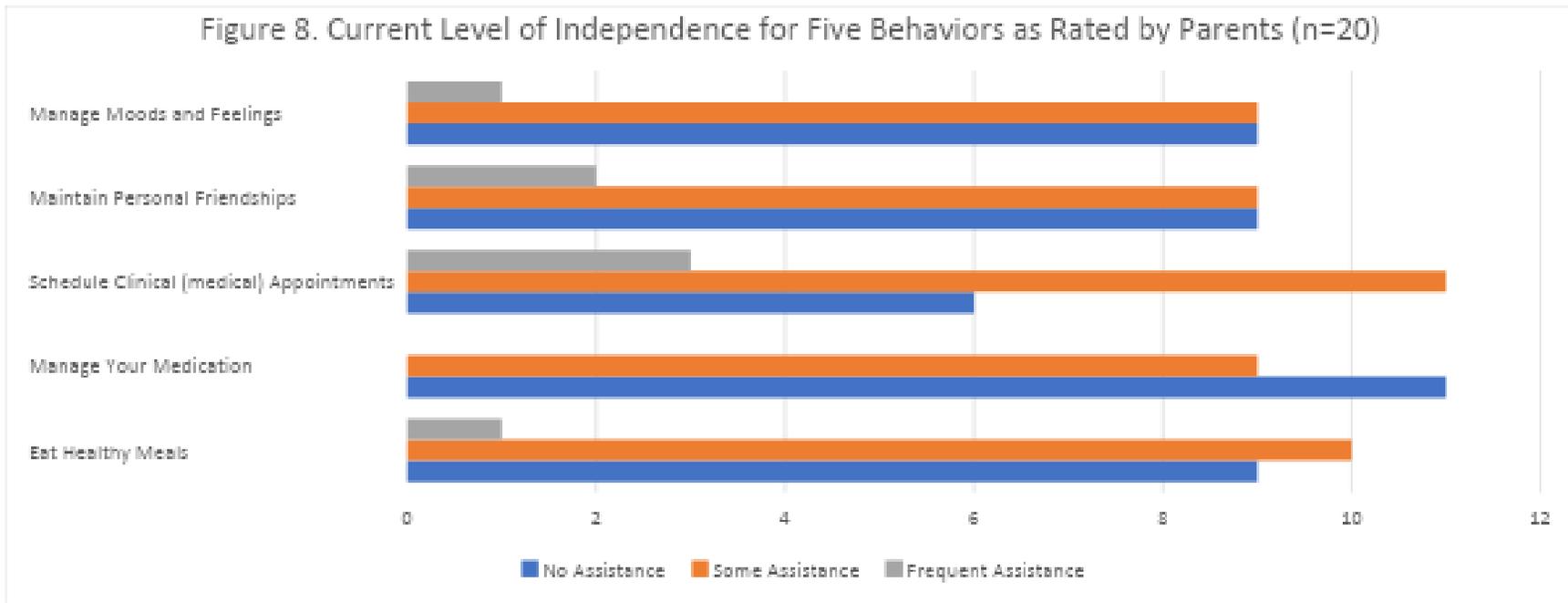
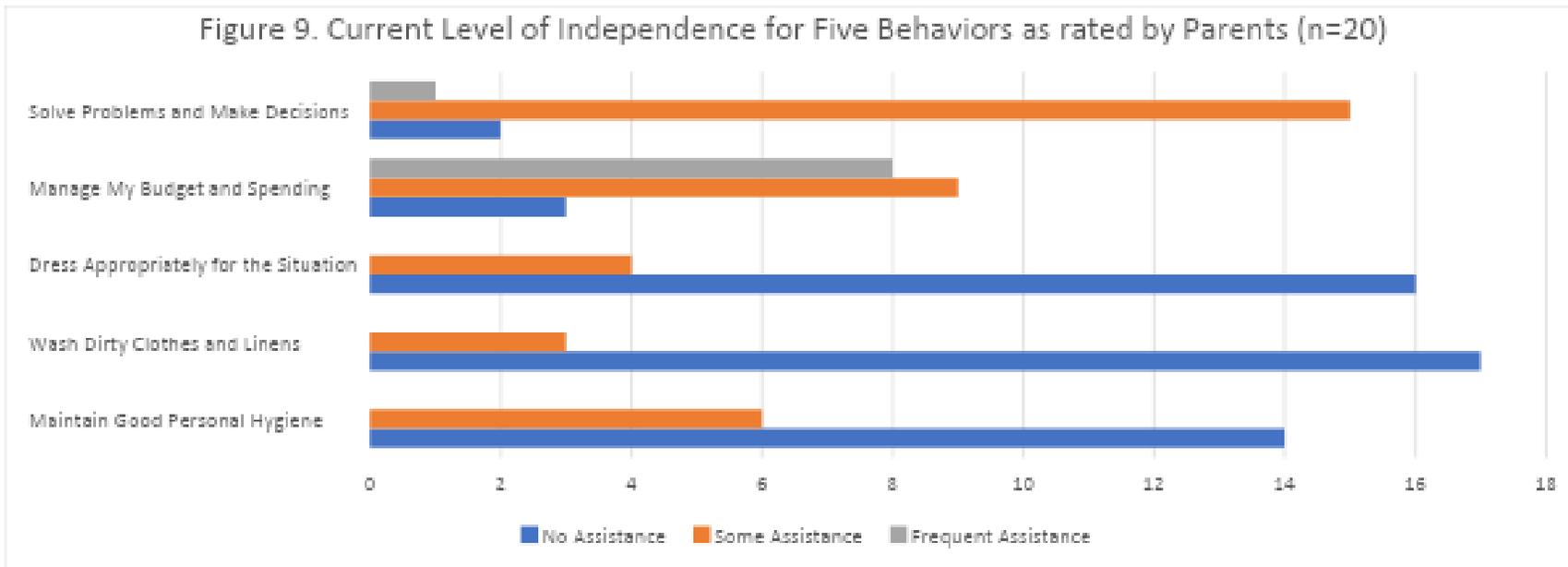


Figure 9. Current Level of Independence for Five Behaviors as rated by Parents (n=20)



### Overall Satisfaction

Thirteen alumni and 20 parents said they “would recommend the Horizons program to other young adults.”

## Conclusions

In summary, 33 responses from alumni and parents to confidential online surveys reveal positive outcomes regarding personal confidence and skill acquisition for independent work and community living. The majority of alumni live alone or with a roommate or partner in an apartment or home. Most manage their own bank account, budget and spending, sometimes with help from a trusted relative or friend. All access the community on foot, using public transit, taxis, Uber and riding with relatives.

The majority report self-managing personal health and wellness, including medication and health insurance, scheduling and attending clinical appointments, and reporting health history and symptoms, with occasional help from relatives or friends. Alumni and parents report high levels of independence for eight functional tasks, including maintaining good personal hygiene, planning healthy meals, shopping for groceries, cooking meals, laundering clothes and linens, dressing appropriately for the situation, organizing and cleaning, and practicing home safety.

Most alumni and parents report paid employment, at least part-time, following graduation. Many successfully applied for paid work with minimal assistance. Several received support from a local agency or contractor to obtain employment. Graduates work in a variety of positions across multiple career clusters (Architecture and Construction; Food Service; Personal Care and Services; Educational and Social Services; Plants, Animals and Natural Resources; Retail Services; and Transportation Services). Most have been employed for 7 months or longer. Fourteen of 20 parents and three alumni reported employment has lasted more than one year.

Nearly all alumni and parents said graduates effectively meet personal goals. A majority of graduates set and manage their own daily schedule, including self-care, paid employment and volunteer work. Alumni maintain social connections through phone calls and social media and meet peers for shared activities three or more times monthly. Overall, there is a high level of satisfaction among alumni parents and graduate respondents to this survey!

*For more information,* please contact  
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**The Horizons School**

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