

Who are we?

We are a group of Midwestern parents, teachers, and community members brought together by the desire to support efforts that more fully include children with disabilities in our local schools. This quarterly newsletter is dedicated to enhancing the education of all our children by providing a place to celebrate successes and offering a forum to discuss the challenges associated with moving towards full inclusion.

IN

Inclusion News | Spring/Summer 2008

Call to Action

The mission of *IN* is to provide a forum for sharing ideas and resources related to inclusive education in the Midwest. To help us fulfill our mission, we welcome the following from you:

- ✓ Resources you've found helpful for parents and teachers.
- ✓ Success stories of inclusive experiences.
- ✓ Things you wish someone had told you sooner!
- ✓ Questions you'd like answered.

The editor can be reached by

FAX
920•424•0858

PHONE
920•424•7227

E-MAIL
skonings@uwosh.edu

INTERNET
www.inclusion-news.org

POST
Department of Special Education
University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh
800 Algoma Blvd
Oshkosh, WI 54901

We also are accepting donations to help fund future issues of *IN*. Checks can be made out to UW-Oshkosh and sent to the editor, Dr. Stacey Skoning, at the above address.

Thank You!

Stacey Skoning, Ph.D.
Editor

Building a Bridge: The Post-Secondary Transition Process

Leah Panther

As a teacher and a writer, Robert Hutchins wrote with experience when he stated, "The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives." What, then, can teachers and parents do for those students who need extra help in making the jump from a student that is taught, to a citizen that is self-taught? Transition services have been in place through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) since 1997 for students aged 16 and over as part of their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) (Bateman, 2002). For those not familiar with transitional planning, it can be a daunting topic. What is it? Why is it in place? And, most importantly, how is a transition plan created?

Transition services are coordinated programs that assist the movement of students from school to post-schooling; this can take the form of ongoing education, vocational training, or the development of independent living skills. It is a part of the planning that goes into the development of an appropriate IEP. The major difference is that transition planning looks several years down the road instead of just one year at a time. As found in Sharon DeFur's (2000) *Designing Individualized Education Program Transition Plans*, transition plans are based purely on the students' needs and focus on what they need to succeed post-schooling. Planning should include the kinds of jobs or careers that students wish to pursue; the kinds of living arrangements that should be considered including group homes, apartments, or home ownership; any day-to-day skills that will be needed; recreational and community options; and the course work that should be completed in high school to help prepare them for all of these opportunities.

Transition services are important for several reasons, the most important being combating drop-out rates and ensuring future employment and a productive adult life. DeFur (2000) explains that IDEA recommends the IEP transition team to start considering post-schooling needs when students first enter high school. Looking forward may help motivate students and give them goals to aspire to long term so they realize the importance of schooling in the short term. Legally, transition plans must be included on the IEP after students reaches 16 years of age, though there is debate on the exact age transition planning should begin and some states have chosen to begin the process

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assistance. (2) Jennifer would have paid community employment. (3) Jennifer would participate with nondisabled friends in the full social and recreational activities of the school and community.

My wife took the lead in working on Jennifer's living situation. The ultimate outcome was that Jennifer moved into her own house when she was 18 and one-half years old. She has one roommate and a live-in caregiver. Jennifer has been living in this house for over 12 years now. Some keys in reaching this housing goal over a six year period were:

- We started early in planning for this transition.
- We used low income housing funds to help with the mortgage down payment.
- We accessed community block grant funds to provide loans for rehabilitation of the house, wheelchair accessibility, and homeownership education.
- We felt it was important that a single agency should not own the house and provide individual supports as well. That's why we worked for home ownership for Jennifer.

- People with disabilities can own their own home and collect rent from roommates without it impacting their governmental benefits.

People who provide Jennifer with daily support services have more respect knowing that it is her home they are entering. Everyone deserves a place to call a home.

In terms of employment, the last 5-6 years Jennifer was in the public school system, her IEPs focused on job skills and placements. Jennifer had several different job placements in an effort to determine the best working environment for her. Although her employment situation several years after leaving the school system is still not ideal, she does have part-time employment in a regular community business as opposed to sheltered workshop jobs. Further, within the last year, Jennifer has started her own microenterprise, selling bottled water and popcorn at community outdoor events. Finding and maintaining suitable employment will always be a challenge for Jennifer. But she has options that affirm her status as a community member.

Finally, we worked on developing a circle of friends for Jennifer at school.

Over the course of a couple of years, a core group of 5 – 7 young women became Jennifer's friendship circle. These students met once a month after school with the assistance of Jennifer's special education teacher. The meeting agenda was always the same: How can we foster increased acceptance and understanding of Jennifer in the school and local community? Over time, these students started attending Jennifer's IEP meetings and they offered a number of good suggestions. The students were not afraid to tell us that we should not send Jennifer to school in stretch pants (a convenience for us in changing her diaper) but we should dress her in typical teenage clothes. We did this. These students opened up a new world of social and recreational possibilities for Jennifer, including her in school and community events. We often had the students over to our house for hot tub parties. Jennifer's world grew considerably during her high school years.

It can be daunting to face the future of a family member with a disability. But, face the future we must, because avoiding the necessary planning for transition can have disastrous results.

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sooner, even by the age of 14. DeFur (2000) suggests these discussions begin with students as young as the elementary grades to help them consider long-term goals and stay proactive about their educational progress.

Transition plans are developed during yearly IEP meetings and include representatives from any public agencies providing and supervising the transition activities. DeFur (2000) also makes the point that IDEA requires that students are invited to participate in the transition discussion. Students are the pivotal part of the process since the entire plan is created around their own individual needs and goals. Bateman (2002) categorizes what must be included within the meeting; specifically that the discussion should revolve around the students' needs in terms of future instruction, community experiences, and employment or other post-school objectives. In appropriate cases, daily living skills and any functional vocational evaluations also should be included. This is also the time to gather information on adult services organizations and other resources families and the student may need to succeed as adults.

Transition services, at their core, aim to help students make an easy and successful move from schooling to post-schooling. This means listening to what students both need and want for themselves, and helping make it a reality. It's the effort of all the parties involved that will help students succeed in whatever paths they choose and become, as Robert Hutchins alludes to, independent lifelong learners.

References

DeFur, S. (2000). Designing individualized education program (IEP) transition plans. *ERIC Digest*, (ED449599).

Bateman, B. (2002) Parent brief: Promoting effective parent involvement in secondary education and transition. *NCSET*. Retrieved March 26, 2008, from <<http://ncset.org/publications/viewesc.asp?id=423>>

Hughes, C. & Carter, E. W. (2000). *The transition handbook: Strategies high school teachers use that work!* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

As described by the publishers, this book is full of “practical strategies, based on the latest research” and includes strategies that high school teachers can “actually use with students who have disabilities, who are at risk for failure, or who need additional support making the transition from high school to adult life.” With over 500 strategies included, you’re bound to find something that works for your students.

IN would like to thank

Ann Freid

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Transition Coalition

<http://transitioncoalition.org/transition/index.php>

This website, shared by a reader, focuses on the transition from school to adult life for individuals with disabilities. They offer information, support, and practical suggestions for a more successful transition process.

From the Editor

Stacey Skoning

IN is moving from publishing four editions per year to two editions per year while searching for on-going funding sources. Some of the options we are pursuing include the following:

- A large grant or donor to provide an endowment allowing many more years of our free publication four times per year.
- Publishing four editions per year with those who receive the newsletter in print paying \$5.00 annually to cover the cost of printing and mailing.
- Publishing two editions per year with those who receive the newsletter in print paying \$3.00 annually to cover the cost of printing and mailing.
- Developing an organization to support the newsletter that would support the inclusion of all children regardless of their (dis)ability, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. A membership fee would be charged, the newsletter

expanded to a journal, and an annual conference created to support the ideals of inclusive education.

Please contact the editor, Stacey Skoning, through one of the methods on the front of *IN* to let us know what your preference is. All responses will be shared with the steering committee as we determine our goals for the future. Thank you for your continued support and interest in inclusive education.

As a reminder to our readers, when ordering through Amazon.com, entering through the bookstore on our website (click on the Amazon logo), will result in a percentage of all of your purchases being sent back to *IN*.

Also, if every reader of *IN* contributed just \$5.00, we would be able to publish two more years of *IN* without searching for additional funding. Help us help others by contributing today.

Learning by Example:

Preparing for Jennifer's Future

Craig Fiedler

My daughter Jennifer requires a substantial amount of support and assistance to navigate through her typical day. There is not sufficient space in this short article to record all of the diagnostic labels and deficiencies noted in various professional reports describing Jennifer over the years. Suffice it to say that after observing her for two minutes anyone would conclude that she has severe and multiple disabilities. What labels and professional reports rarely capture is the true personality and dreams of the person behind those diagnostic terms. The person is always more complicated than the labels can convey. The labels also tend to dehumanize people.

Any family contemplating the future of their child with a disability must address at least three fundamental

questions: Where will my child live in the future? Where will my child work in the future? And, to what extent will my child participate in the social and recreational life of the community? I will briefly address how my family wrestled with these questions when facing an uncertain future for Jennifer.

Ever since Jennifer was a small child, my wife and I had decided that she would transition from our home at the normal age (around 18 or so). Until the age of 12, we assumed that Jennifer would live in a group home in the community. We were forced to expand our thinking when we found out from the county human services agency that there was a long waiting list of several years for individuals seeking group home placement. After our initial panic and fear, we

moved into action. Our first step was to develop a circle of support to help us plan for Jennifer's future. We used a personal futures planning process that addressed the following issues: dreams for the individual with disabilities, specific goals, likes/dislikes of the person, strengths, limitations, opportunities in support of personal goals, and obstacles to personal goals. We involved a lot of people in this planning process: family friends, co-workers, nondisabled school friends of Jennifer, extrafamilial members, school personnel, and social services persons. Over the course of several meetings, this circle of support group developed three future goals for Jennifer: (1) Jennifer would own her own house and have live-in support

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Steering Committee Members – Ashley Faulstich, Mary Johnson, Betty Long, Teri Miller, Roxanne Nowinski, Leah Panther, Rick Ramirez, Stacey Skoning, and Amy Von Bergen

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Special Education Department
University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh
800 Algoma Blvd
Oshkosh, WI 54901

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