

The following stories represent the experience and outcomes for two individuals with disabilities who have recently graduated from high school. The stories represent their experiences in using person-centered planning and personal support teams to obtain jobs consistent with their individual vision for employment and that are consistent with their gifts, talents, and interests. While both stories represent positive outcomes of people becoming employed, they occurred post graduation from high school. Ideally this planning process should occur early on in high school. This would allow transition services provided by the schools to support the development of career and other community lifestyles that are important to the student. In fact the law states:

“beginning at age 14, and updated annually, the IEP must include a statement of transition service needs of the child under the applicable components of the child’s IEP that focuses on the child’s course of study(300.347) and beginning at age 16 (or younger, if deemed appropriate by the IEP Team), the IEP must include a statement of needed transition services for the child, including when appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages (Section 300.347).”

Transition services are required to include (Section 300.29):

- **Instruction:** Teaching the student. What types of classes or course work might be of benefit;
- **Related Services:** Services the student might need in order to benefit from or access transition services (e.g. transportation, recreation, counseling, assistive technology devices);
- **Community Experiences:** Opportunities to learn in the local community, in real life situations (e.g. learning bus routes, using parks and recreation programs, work experiences);
- **Employment and other Post-School Adult Living Activities:** Services that may lead to employment such as career exploration/part time jobs or exploration of different living situations such as supported apartments or home ownership;
- **Daily Living Skills** (if applicable): Skills such money management, cooking, and shopping and;
- **Functional Vocational Evaluation** (if applicable): Activities designed to explore career interests and aptitudes.

Students should start having the opportunities for career exploration via job shadowing, school to career activities, and person-centered career planning early on in high school. Unfortunately, many times people start thinking about “transition” in the second semester of a student’s senior year of high school. This is too late. This leads to people being plugged into programs and/or being evaluated based upon their deficits and what they cannot do often leading to a prevocational program, day program or a sheltered workshop and in some cases people are relegated to staying home.

There is another option . . . person centered planning and it involves . . .

- Start planning at the **Right Time** (age 14 and 16);

- With the **Right People** who know you well and are committed to supporting you in living a lifestyle of your choice (friends, family members, neighbors, people from your church, school, teachers, etc.);
- Working towards the **Right Outcomes** that make sense to you and are based upon your vision for the future;
- Meeting with the **Right Frequency** to get activities done towards achieving your vision;
- Doing the **Right Stuff** . . . are we achieving the outcomes consistent with your vision for the future and in a way that makes sense to you; and
- Finally, are we taking the time to listen, learn, and reflect about what we are learning and doing?

Person-centered planning can guide the development of a quality transition plan where:

“services are based upon the individual student’s needs, taking into account the student’s preferences and interests and that represents transition services which are a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability ... designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including: •post-secondary education •vocational training •integrated employment •continuing education • adult services •independent living •community participation (Section 300.29)

You may be asking,

What is Person Centered Planning? It is an approach to planning where a team of people who believe in you, support you to have a lifestyle that is consistent with your desires for a life during and after school. Your person centered transition plan is based upon your interests, desires and talents to create action steps to gain meaningful post school outcomes.

So who makes up this planning team? Interested people in developing a career plan identify people who will assist him or her to create these plans. Typically, your support team will include family members, friends, favorite teacher, and other people who believe in your desire to a lifestyle that makes sense to you. Other support people could include local businesspersons, or a vocational rehabilitation counselor.

What actually do planners do? Planners bring their experience and knowledge of the person. They seek to build a clear picture of you by listening to how you see your life and later, by sharing what they have discovered during their time together. After this, they use what they have learned to develop ideas to assist you in your transition from school to post school life such as finding a job, or to live in a place you choose, or how to be more involved in your community. Finally, as it becomes clearer what your desires are, the planners develop action steps with you to move the ideas forward and take the necessary steps to ensure these steps are completed.

Who leads the planning process? Most all work groups get more done when they have someone help facilitate the planning sessions. The facilitator assists you in moving their ideas

forward by seeking participation from all the planners. The facilitator also keeps records, summarizes the discussion, and ensures the planning and action steps are working to create a lifestyle that makes sense to you.

When is the planning complete? It isn't, it's ongoing. As you reach one or more goals, new ones begin to emerge. Everyone's lifestyles are constantly changing, and with these plans, new action steps are created to support your changing lifestyle.

Jamie's Story

Jamie was deemed unemployable and was referred to a sheltered workshop to “acquire appropriate job skills” that would enable him to get a job in the community. However, this was unacceptable for him, his parents, and people who were committed to him living a lifestyle of his choice- connected to his gifts, talents, and preferences. Jamie and a small but committed group of his allies came together to start identifying his vision for how he would like to live his life, which included working in his community. First, Jamie and his circle of support identified his conditions for employment- what is the ideal environment that he wants to work in. Second, what are the types of work he wants to do- not job titles or job descriptions. Third, what are the contributions brings to an employer. After Identifying these three elements the next step is to identify employers in his community that have job duties in their workplace consistent with Jamie's conditions and preferences. A list of employers in his community was generated, then we asked each person present if they new someone who worked at or owned one of these places of business. After going around the room one of the people who was supporting Jamie's efforts to become employed stated her brother-in-law was the manager at the local Truck-O-Mat. There were several other businesses that were identified where people had contacts but upon initial reflection the Truck-O-Mat met all of Jamie's conditions and preferences for a job. Cynthia, who's bother-in-law worked there, spoke with him that evening about what Jamie wanted to do and the contributions he brought to the Truck-O-Mat. The issue of “disability” was never mentioned nor brought up because Jamie brings skills to the Truck-O-Mat that it needs. Jamie was asked to come in to meet the manager (the brother-in-law). Jamie, Cynthia, and the manager meet to discuss job duties, expectations, pay, hours, etc. Jamie was offered the job. He works 30 hours per week making \$7.50 per hour. He has been working there for three and half years and really enjoys his co-workers. In order for him to get connected we new he would have to fit into the work “culture.” One of the expectations of all employees is that they sign up to bring in donuts one morning a month. Cynthia identified (by observation and asking her brother-in-law) who liked what kind of donuts so when Jamie brought in the donuts he would have everyone's favorites. This may seem like a same thing but it went a long way to Jamie becoming a part of the social fabric of Truck-O-Mat. Jamie has learned over time what his co-workers preferences for donuts, food, sports, etc., are and uses them frequently to develop and maintain his friendships with his co-workers. All of this came about through a quality transition plan that was developed through person-centered planning with a strong foundation in supporting Jamie's self-determination.

Maria's Story

Maria lives in south Kansas City and was having difficulty in transitioning from high school to post secondary life. Maria was referred for an assessment and lasted three days before her behavior was too “disruptive” that the assessment was discontinued. Maria, parents, uncle, high school teacher, service coordinator from DMH-MR/DD, and a woman from her church came together to support Maria getting a job in the community. Maria's conditions, preferences, and contributions were identified via person-centered planning approach. Her preferences included office work typing filing, making copies, answering the phone, greeting customers, taking messages, and data entry. One of her conditions was that she wanted to be around little children. A list of employers was generated that included 18 local employers that meet Maria's preferences. Connections were available at each of these 18 employers, however only two employers meet her condition of working around little children. Maria and her mother went to speak to these two employers and use the connections they had through Maria's circle of support. Maria was offered a job at a local day care center doing office work but also helped supervise the playground with two co-workers, and told stories to the children at circle time in the morning and afternoon. She greets the children and their parent(s), makes sure parent(s) signed their children in and out, enters all the data of new attendees and update information on the database, makes the copies of materials to go home with the children, and types up the stories she tells the children each day so that they can share it with their family and us it as a taking point about their child's day. Maria has worked at the Kinder care for two years and 9 months. She earns \$7.00 per hour and works 35 hours per week.