

# Chapter 7: Community Transition

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This chapter builds upon the previous chapters by focusing on preparation for and transition to life beyond high school. In this transition, individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) leave an entitlement system and enter systems based instead on eligibility and availability. In order to take full advantage of the options available at transition, individuals must be equipped with the necessary skills to live, work, and play in the community. Each individual must be properly prepared to be a contributing citizen.

Although this section covers topics related to children’s lives beyond high school, it urges parents to work on them even while their children are still in school. This chapter includes many suggestions for planning for children’s transitions from a school program to adult services, employment, and living in the community. It also introduces important legal and financial planning issues that every family should think about.

It is important that parents not wait until the child is a teenager to formulate plans for the future.

One of the most challenging times for families and individuals with ASD is when an adolescent is about to transition from a school program to the uncertainty of adult services. Questions about postsecondary education, vocational training, employment, community living, and sources of financial support for the individual with ASD must be addressed. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) requires that transition planning for this shift to adulthood and adult service systems begin by age 16 years, although it may begin earlier if the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team agrees.

The student, parents, and members of the IEP team should work together to help the student make choices about the individuals’ path for the future. This will involve discussions about where to live, what kind of work to do, and what recreation and leisure time activities the person would like to be involved in when not working. Transition planning through the IEP process identifies the student’s goals and a plan for reaching them in each of these areas.

One of the biggest changes that parents face at the time of a child’s transition from education to community services is the shift from the mandated services of education to the eligibility-driven services of the adult service system. All children are entitled to educational services. But in the adult service system there are no entitlements. Individuals must “qualify” or be determined eligible for services. Transition services within education should support parents and the child in applying for the services for which they are eligible.

## **Basic Principles of Transition:**

- 1) Start early.**
- 2) Involve all service agencies and funding sources.**
- 3) Secure a job before graduation that can be retained or identify post-secondary education options.**
- 4) Knowledge planning with family involvement.**

In addition to the transition planning, IDEA requires that the school provide the student who is transitioning out of high school a summary of his or her academic achievement and functional performance. The summary is to include recommendations as to what assistance is necessary for the student in order to allow her or him to meet the postsecondary goals.

The section on Community Transition is best used in conjunction with the rest of this document as transition activities will require many of the same types of strategies and supports identified for individuals in the early years of education. Some of the necessary skills an individual needs to transition to adult life include a communications system, the ability to integrate/self modulate sensory input, and socially appropriate behavior. The extent to which an individual is able to transition from individually focused activities to an adult life, particularly employment, determines the quality of life after school.

The stakes are very high. During the school years, parents and educators must partner and strive to prepare individuals with ASD for 40-60 years of life in the community. The focus of this section is to enhance the information in previous chapters in order that the dreams and personal visions of people with ASD become a reality.

## **School to Adulthood**

### ***Overview***

Transitioning from school to adulthood is a process of preparing a person with ASD to be part of the community. In order to accomplish this, individuals and family members must have a vision of what this life after school will resemble. This vision will drive the transition services in school and beyond. To make the vision a reality, the individual's family members and other members of the transition team must be committed to the process. Depending on the severity of the disability of the individual with ASD, this transitioning process may take a long period of time, with the possibility that the individual may require and need to receive long term supports.

### **Components to Achieve**

- ◆ Develop vision statements of expected outcomes with the full input from the person with disabilities to the greatest degree possible at every stage to determine if the path being followed is leading to the work outcome they desire.
- ◆ Determine the dreams, interests, strengths, skills and barriers for the individual who will make the journey.
- ◆ Include pragmatic, person-centered, and individualized strategies which focus specifically on the vision. These strategies should support outcomes which will occur in the community.
- ◆ Develop collaborative efforts among student, family, school and external agencies. Design a course of action that identifies how the receiving agency will assume the supports and responsibilities of the process.
- ◆ Identify the person within schools and agencies who will accept individual responsibilities in the support and “hand off” the process.
- ◆ Assess progress at each stage. Reset tactics, funding, and supports when necessary.
- ◆ Take supported opportunities to facilitate independence. Learn from mistakes and incorporate lessons.
- ◆ Take advantage of new opportunities made possible by changing “best practice” laws and funding.
- ◆ Capture, retain and utilize the necessary financial support at each stage of the temporal passage.

- ◆ Have a long term and ongoing training program for parents, guardians, educators, administrators, and adult service provider agencies regarding the transition process, people or agencies involved, financing systems, etc. This should include the benefits of community employment vs. sheltered employment and post secondary education options.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY) has published a Transition Summary series to help families and students with disabilities focus on taking definite steps toward a successful transition. Below is an adapted portion of NICHCY Transition Summary, (No. 7, September 1991), available in its entirety from [www.nichcy.org/educatechildren/transition\\_adulthood/pages/transition101.aspx](http://www.nichcy.org/educatechildren/transition_adulthood/pages/transition101.aspx).

### ***Middle School: Start Transition Planning***

- ◆ Involve the child in career exploration activities.
- ◆ Visit with a school counselor to talk about interests and capabilities.
- ◆ Have the child participate in vocational assessment activities.
- ◆ Along with the student, use information about interests and capabilities to make preliminary decisions about possible careers (academic versus vocational or a combination).
- ◆ Involving the student, make use of books, career fairs, and people in the community to find out more about careers of interest.

Keep in mind that while self-determination needs to be considered, students with ASD may mature more slowly than others. Therefore, their timetables for independence may be longer. **Beware of eliminating options too early based on academic and behavioral expectations they may not have achieved at the same age as their peers.**

### ***High School: Define Career and Vocational Goals***

- ◆ Develop a transition plan that will drive the IEP. Work with school staff and community agencies to define and refine the transition plan.
- ◆ Help identify and ensure that the student takes high school courses that are required for entry into college, trade schools, or careers of interest.
- ◆ Help identify and make sure the individual takes vocational programs offered in high school, if a vocational career is of interest.
- ◆ Encourage the student to become involved in early work experiences, such as job try-outs, summer jobs, volunteering, or part-time work.
- ◆ Reassess interests and capabilities, based on real-world or school experiences. (Is the career field still of interest? If not, redefine goals.)
- ◆ Make sure the student participates in ongoing vocational assessment and identify gaps of knowledge or skills that need to be addressed and address these gaps.

### ***Elements Not to be Overlooked***

- ◆ If eligible for vocational rehabilitative services, make sure the individual works with a vocational rehabilitative counselor to identify and pursue additional training or to secure employment (including supported employment) in his or her field of interest.

- ◆ If the individual is not already receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), contact the local SSI office shortly before he or she turns 18 years. Family income is no longer considered in determining eligibility for benefits after the person's 18th birthday. If eligible for SSI benefits such as SSI income, find out how work incentives apply.
- ◆ Help identify and confirm that the individual takes any special tests necessary for entry to postsecondary schools (e.g., PSAT, SAT, ACT). Deadlines to apply for this testing are generally earlier when accommodations are requested.
- ◆ Visit the institution, contact the office of disability services at the institution, and confirm that the accommodations needed for college coursework are available.
- ◆ Contact the Division of Mental Health at DSHS for Regional Support Network (RSN) information in Washington counties regarding mental health assistance to determine a child's eligibility for services, including Medicaid and waiver services. Even if the individual can be maintained on a parent's medical insurance plan, Medicaid can be useful as supplemental insurance. In addition, Medicaid eligibility is required for many adult mental health services.
- ◆ Contact agencies that can help, such as disability-specific organizations like the state or local chapter of the Autism Society of America. Ask about all services for which the student might be eligible.
- ◆ Continue to work through the plan by following through on decisions to attend postsecondary institutions or obtain employment.

### ***Education and Training Prior to Employment***

- ◆ Have the IEP team and other disability support organization(s) help identify postsecondary institutions (community colleges, universities, vocational programs in the community, trade schools, etc.) that offer training in a career of interest for the individual.
- ◆ Identify the accommodations that would be helpful to support the individual. Make sure that documentation is current on the student's IEP. This will support any request for accommodations at an educational institution. Find out if the educational institution makes, or can make, these accommodations.
- ◆ Write or call for catalogues, financial aid information, and request an application from appropriate community colleges, universities, or trade schools.

## **Practical Tips for Transitions to Work after High School**

### ***Getting Prepared***

- ◆ Behavior needs to be understood, managed, supported, and appropriate for the expected outcomes.
- ◆ The individual needs a communication system that allows the individual to engage in functional and reciprocal communication with people in his or her environment.
- ◆ The IEP should emphasize development of vocational independent living and community participation skills and supports.

- ◆ Access various agencies that will be needed for support during school and after graduation (as soon as possible) and encourage them to join the process. Each organization, if invited, can explain the process to access agency services, as well as eligibility criteria. Some of these include, but are not limited to:
  - Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)
    - Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD)
    - Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
    - Division of Services for the Blind
    - Mental Health Division, Regional Support Network
  - Department of Health (DOH)
  - Social Security Income (SSI)
  - Work Source
  - Employment Networks
- ◆ During the school years, focus the transition section of the IEP on a variety of vocational avenues in the community (situational assessments). An unsuccessful placement or job experience should be viewed as helpful in learning about the types of supports (training, conditions, and technology) the individual needs and their work preferences.
- ◆ Focus on abilities not disabilities. Do not assume the person is incapable of any task. Remember to structure trials using modification and supports in the community.
- ◆ Teach to individual strengths and search for a job with the maximum earning and benefits possible. This is needed because funding obtained from all sources including employment is the key for the individual to achieve their greatest community integration potential.
- ◆ In the final school year, transition goals will drive the IEP. The vocational portion of the IEP should focus on the acquisition and retention of a paid job in the community in such a way as to avoid loss of government benefits (e.g. SSI, Medicaid, Food Stamps, etc.)
- ◆ The high school should develop job skills and supports specifically designed or carved out to meet the individual's and employer's needs. Matching abilities with the needs of a business drives job development. It is helpful to answer the following questions during this process:
  - (1) Which jobs match to the individual's abilities?
  - (2) What weaknesses are liabilities to placement?
  - (3) How can these challenges be overcome?
- ◆ While social activities are important to reinforce and to connect skills, be cautious not to weaken the transition plan by focusing primarily on social opportunities. Every student needs access to skill building opportunities for employment upon transition from school.

Currently the available support option for day activities after students leave school is employment. While there is an effort to figure out how to support transition students with reasonable day activities while they are looking for work, the goal both in federal and state rule and regulation for all students is employment (National Council on Disability, 2005). People with very severe disabilities face substantial obstacles both in terms of their ability to take advantage of social opportunities and employment opportunities. It is important not to sacrifice one or the other.

Employment is a way in which each person is provided with a natural way to be truly included in her or his community at least some of the time. It is difficult to reliably accomplish that in other specialized services, but there is evidence that it can reliably be accomplished within current spending levels for about 55-70 percent of the people who get employment supports. Employment provides a lot of service for a relatively small investment for most of the people supported.

Even for the small number of people that need very high levels of support, employment is very cost effective over the long-term. With a higher level investment, employment could be as effective for people with severe disabilities as it is for people with mild and moderate disabilities.

## Reaching Out

- ◆ When determining an individual's learning or work potential, utilize assessments in the community that are meaningful to the individual in light of expected outcomes.
- ◆ Take supported risks. Sheltering and risk avoidance will not yield community supported employment. A simple adjustment to the work area or an additional piece of equipment is often all that is needed. The job developer working with the employer can facilitate such accommodations and open up possibilities never explored. Be aware and mindful of the individual's environmental conditions, socialization, sensory issues, etc.
- ◆ Investigate places in the community that offer volunteer experiences and use them for job sampling. These include:
  - a. Public libraries
  - b. Nursing homes
  - c. Humane Society
  - d. Public Television
  - e. Hospitals
  - f. United Way Agencies
  - g. YMCA Programs
  - h. Public Radio
  - i. Local Universities
  - j. Food Banks
- ◆ For places that do not offer volunteer experience, create a "contract" that you can "sell" to the employer and take to each site for the worker, employer and agency to sign. Document features will include (but need not be limited to):
  - a. The job experience is a non paid experience.
  - b. The job experience is a part of the individual's transition plan that drives the IEP goals and objectives.
  - c. The job experience is not taking work away from regular employees.
  - d. The individual is not guaranteed a job after the work experience.
  - e. The individual is covered by worker's compensation under the school that is being represented.

Following work sampling, full time employment can be discussed so that this approach does not represent a barrier to employment.

### ***Identifying and Maintaining Supports***

- ◆ Learn about funding sources, how they work, what to do to acquire them and what each will offer (by 13-14 years old). Some agencies that provide or supervise funding include:
  - a. Association of County Human Services
  - b. DSHS-Division of Developmental Disabilities
  - c. Social Security Administration (SSI)
  - d. DSHS-Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
  - e. Washington State Mental Health Division
  - f. Washington State Department of Health
  - g. Regional Support Networks.
- ◆ Develop knowledge and determine what supports will be needed and acquire them when needed, beginning with the planning of school to work transition until acquisition of a paid job in the community (preferably full time).

### ***Strategies***

- ◆ Promote the individual with tactics similar to those used when searching for employment to “open doors”.

Some “Sales/Marketing” tools might include:

  - a. Résumé (including attendance records, awards)
  - b. Videotape or pictorial of the individual working
  - c. Letters of recommendations from supervisors/employers
  - d. List of job skills and contributions to work environments
  - e. List of supports they will have including transportation
  - f. Performance reviews
  - g. Productivity on various jobs
- ◆ Create partnerships with the business community.
  - a. Invite business leaders to school, utilize family connections, expanded social circles (family owned business, churches, professional contacts, etc.).
  - b. Go to community meetings and work sites. Discuss employing people with disabilities in supported employment.
  - c. Encourage the business community to communicate about their specific employment needs.

- d. Get statements from prior job experience supervisors. Relate positive and successful experiences from employers of individuals with disabilities.
- ◆ In some situations, it may be necessary to modify the goal to fade supports. Some individuals with ASD require long term or ongoing supports. Plans should then include identification of funding for these supports such as the Washington State Endowment Trust, Social Security Work Incentives, Individual Development Plans, County wide supports, etc.

## **Other Issues to Consider**

- ◆ Training for all stakeholders should be ongoing. Use a variety of resources to train in areas such as job find, job development, job carving, self-employment/entrepreneur, job coaching, natural supports, behavior supports/strategies and modification, funding sources and uses, interviewing skills, employer expectations, (job descriptions, company rules, social etiquette, etc.).
- ◆ If the individual and his family desire, explore residential options that may be suitable for the full transfer to adult life to increase independence.

Agencies who can help with residential choices include:

- a. DSHS-Division of Developmental Disabilities Case Manager
- b. Residential Services Providers in city or county
- c. Group Homes
- c. Real Estate Firms
- d. Home and Apartment publications
- e. The Internet
- f. Local Autism Support Groups
- g. Community Alternative for People with Autism (CAPA)

**It should be emphasized that residential services often involve long waiting periods and therefore should be applied for many years before they are needed.**

- ◆ Recreation for people with disabilities is just as important as it is for their peers without disabilities. Access to the full range of recreational possibilities now exists in many communities, including vacation possibilities. Community recreational sites as well as the Internet can lead to exciting, person centered possibilities. Research indicates that individuals with disabilities can become isolated as they grow older.
- ◆ Due to lack of mobility, income, and social networks, individuals with disabilities may have difficulty making the right friends and meeting the right people to assure a quality adult life. Memberships in religious/cultural affiliations (e.g., church or synagogue), clubs, and recreational programs provide natural and ongoing support networks that can assist persons with disabilities in maintaining friendships throughout their life.

## ***Practical Tips for Transitioning to Post Secondary Education after High School***

Students with disabilities have the right and responsibility to pursue a job after high school which may require additional education or supports. When this occurs, the transition plan and IEP should support this vision. Preparation should then start at the beginning of high school for post secondary learning: such as post-secondary educational prerequisites like two years of foreign language, etc.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), the school is responsible for identifying and assessing individuals with disabilities and is mandated to provide appropriate educational instruction and related services. However, IDEA does not apply to individuals in postsecondary education, as the individuals themselves become responsible for many of the services that were once provided for them.

There are three pieces of legislation that impact postsecondary education. They are the Rehabilitation Education Act (REA) of 1973 (particularly section 504), the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states that “no otherwise qualified individual with disabilities can be excluded from, denied the benefits of, or be discriminated against by any program receiving federal financial assistance.” Although colleges and universities are not required to offer special education courses, subpart E requires both public and private institutions of higher education learning to make appropriate academic adjustments and reasonable accommodations (not modifications) to ensure individuals with disabilities can fully participate in the same programs and activities as non-disabled individuals.

ADA upholds and extends REA’s civil rights protections to all public and private institutions regardless of whether they receive federal funds.

FERPA protects the confidentiality of individual’s records at a postsecondary institution.

Although section 504 and ADA require equal access to post secondary education for individuals with disabilities, once the individual has been admitted, the individual is responsible for identifying himself as a person with a disability. He or she must also provide documentation that can trigger the appropriate accommodations. This accommodation process does not begin, however, until the individual contacts the college Office of Disability Services (ODS) and provides this documentation. Decisions regarding these accommodations then are made on an individual basis.

There are four major types of post secondary education:

- a. Vocational/Technical Schools
- b. Community Colleges (two year)
- c. Colleges
- d. Universities

## ***Important Considerations for Postsecondary Transition***

- ◆ Check with the postsecondary education facility to ascertain the requirements necessary to attend.
- ◆ Postsecondary options should be explored early in high school to select the proper course work.
- ◆ Choose a postsecondary program that provides the services and supports that will be needed by the individual after graduation.

- ◆ The individual and families should contact disability coordinators at prospective postsecondary programs to determine the services and supports which are available.
- ◆ The individual should receive training in self-advocacy on how to request needed accommodations and supports.
- ◆ Individuals should visit or audit classes from desired schools.
- ◆ University or college professors are not informed of an individual's disability, only of the necessary accommodation. Individuals and families may consider, if the professors require, additional information in order to effectively support individual learning.
- ◆ Electives during high school can be used as remedial courses to address academic areas of weakness.
- ◆ Individuals may wish to consider developing keyboarding skills to assist in assignment completion. Explore other assistive technology which might support individual learning and participation. e.g., computer software.
- ◆ Consider taking the SAT and ACT's tests as early as possible. Multiple chances to improve scores can be helpful.
- ◆ Take advantage of tutorials that are available to help with the SAT, ACT testing process.
- ◆ Take advantage of tutoring in high school that is available to help with difficult classes.
- ◆ Request that a representative from the university/college/vocational programs attend the IEP to assist in transition activities.
- ◆ Develop knowledge concerning dormitories, post-secondary residential housing, roommates, etc.