



Pennsylvania Youth Leadership
Network
Secondary Transition Toolkit

Developed by youth for youth

1st Edition

July 2008

PYLN

Welcome to the Toolkit!



Dear Youth, Families, and Professionals,

The Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network (PYLN) has created secondary transition toolkit to assist youth in their transition into the adult world. The best thing about the toolkit is that it was written and designed by youth with disabilities who are members of the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network (PYLN) for youth. It can also be used with families and professionals as a youth-friendly Toolkit for transition.

Within the Toolkit there are three phases:

Phase One: Accept Yourself!

Phase Two: Declare Yourself!

Phase Three: Empower Yourself!

Each phase is filled with PYLN members' transition stories, along with information and activities to help you take charge of your life!

This is our first attempt at the Toolkit and we plan to keep changing it and adding information to meet your needs. If you have any ideas to share, please email the PYLN at pyln.gb@gmail.com.

Since we plan to continually update the Toolkit, you can find the latest version online. It's as simple as going to this website: www.sharedwork.org/patransition. You do have to register to use the site, remember to write down your user name and password since you'll need it next time you visit the site. On the left side of the Pennsylvania Community on Transition homepage, please click on the PYLN Secondary Transition Toolkit.

Thanks,

PA Youth Leadership Network Member



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PA Youth Leadership Network: Who We Are

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What is the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network (PYLN)?

The mission of the PYLN is: *"To develop the self-determination, empowerment, and leadership of youth, that promotes successful post school outcomes in the areas of education, employment, independent living, and health and wellness among youth and young adults throughout Pennsylvania."* Furthermore, the purpose of *"this group is to foster an open dialogue with youth and young adults to create, enhance, or change important issues that affect their everyday lives including: transition from high school to adult life; policies and practices that affect individuals with disabilities; and promote the inclusion of youth and young adults with disabilities into all aspects of society at the national, state and local level."*

Since 2005 the goals of the PYLN have been:

- 1) Collectively work and collaborate with a variety of groups to ensure a successful transition of youth with disabilities
- 2) Establish and maintain a mentoring coalition between youth with disabilities and young adults who have accomplished successful transitions.
- 3) Develop, distribute and implement self-determination/ empowerment resources for use in educational programs.
- 4) Develop a youth friendly disability resource guide/template that highlights basic definitions, general information regarding transition services, and resources at the state and local levels.
- 5) Ensure equitable policies, practices, and attitudes that affect individuals with disabilities.

To achieve these goals the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network has completed multiple activities, trainings, and documents throughout the past few years. Some of these have included: creating and managing all training and activities for youth at the following events: three Pennsylvania Statewide Transition Conferences, the Youth Outcome Expo, Temple University Institute on Disability C2P2 program, and the PA Statewide Independent Living Council's conference. We've also collaborated with other states to expand youth development and youth leadership efforts across the country.



Meet the PYLN members who contributed to the Toolkit

Josie Badger



Age- 24

Disability- Muscular Dystrophy

Location- Wampum, PA/Pittsburgh, PA

Activities- Josie Badger is attending graduate school for rehabilitation counseling at the University of Pittsburgh. In May of 2007 she graduated summa cum laude from Geneva College, in Pennsylvania, majoring in Disability Law and Advocacy. On the state level, Josie is a founding member and youth coordinator of the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network. She is working with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention on a book addressing youth with disabilities transitioning out of high school. Josie is a member of the Governor's Council for People with Disabilities. She also consults with Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network.

Everett Deibler



Age- 24

Disability- Cerebral Palsy

Location- Lebanon, PA

Activities- Everett has been very involved in the disability community for most of his life. One of his major activities is wheelchair sports. From 2001 through 2003, Everett was team captain for his junior wheelchair basketball team in Philadelphia. He received a varsity sport letter at Edinboro University in 2004. He was also a member of the 2006 National Champion United States Quad Rugby team. Beyond sports, Everett has been active in disability leadership. He was a planner and key presenter at the PA Statewide Independent Living Council's Youth Conference and at Temple University's Institute on Disability C2P2. He is also a committee chair for the National Youth Leadership Network's Public Outreach committee.

Paul Fogle



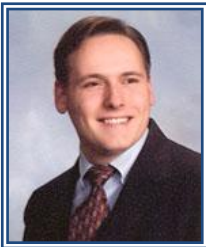
Age- 24

Disability- Congenital Central-Hypoventilation Syndrome

Location- Oley, PA

Activities- Paul is involved with many activities at his school, Penn State Harrisburg, including College Republicans, Student Government Association, and Faculty Senate. At the state level, Paul is a member of the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network Governing Board, Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council, and Children with Special Healthcare Needs Stakeholder Group.

Jeff Hladio



Age- 26

Disability- Cerebral Palsy

Location- Peters Township, PA

Activities- Jeff is involved in many activities inside and outside of the disability community. His hobbies include computers and sports. He works as a sales representative for Treasured Auctions (an online store). He has been a member of the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network since it began two years ago. Jeff also volunteers at the United Cerebral Palsy in Pittsburgh.

Joe Kleppick



Age- 22

Disability- Aspergers Syndrome, Attention Deficit Disorder

Location- Pittsburgh, PA

Activities- Joe serves on many different boards in the Greenfield area of Pittsburgh. He is also involved with many different political campaigns and boards. He currently works at Wal-Mart. He has been an active member of the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network since 2006.

Tammy Klinger



Age- 27

Disability- Learning disability (dyslexia), Social Anxiety disorder

Location- Kennett Square, PA

Activities- Tammy graduated from Marywood University in May 2005 with a Bachelor's degree in Special Education. She now teaches for the Upper Darby School District as a full-time building substitute. Tammy enjoys the outdoors and looks forward to going kayaking as often as possible.

Rachel Reimert



Age- 18

Disability- Learning Disabilities

Location- Kempton, PA

Activities- Rachel is new to the PYLN Governing Board this year. In addition to being involved with the PYLN Rachael has been involved in chorus at school, Credo, and drama club. She was a back stage helper/manager of a school play. She has received the "X" Award, Aspiring Student Award, and has been a peer tutor, and a High Honor Roll student.

Collan Baker



Age- 18

Disability- Aspergers Syndrome and Attention Deficit Disorder

Location- Bear Lake, PA

Activities- Collan has been involved in high school track for the past 5 years, lettering twice. He has also been actively involved in chorus. He has been a junior counselor at the Gertrude Barber Institute and has been a volunteer at Head Start. He has received the Temple Grandin Award for his work and accomplishments. For the past two summers he has worked for Alleghany Coupling in Warren County.

Crystal Davis



Age- 19

Disability- Bipolar Type I Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder

Location- Yardley, PA

Activities- Crystal is currently involved in an apprenticeship program through which she is learning to train assistance dogs for individuals with physical and/or psychiatric disabilities.

Kelly Lauth



Age- 23

Disability- Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder

Location- Pittsburgh, PA

Activities- Kelly graduated magna cum laude from Geneva College in May, 2007 with a degree in Communications and Theater, and a minor in music. She has won numerous awards for her dedication to the performing arts, such as winning the Junior Miss scholarship program for her county in 2003. She is a member of Alpha Psi Omega, an exclusive theater fraternity, and the International Thespian Society. She is a member of the band The Manifolds, alongside her husband and brother in law, and has recently recorded a new album, on which she sings and plays guitar, piano, and drums.

Allison Mervis



Age- 23

Disability- Blindness

Location- Munhall, PA

Activities- Allison received a presidential merit scholarship and voice scholarship throughout her undergraduate education at Chatham University. In the summer of 2005, she volunteered in the access technology center at Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh. She is currently pursuing her master's in rehabilitation counseling at the University of Pittsburgh.

Lewis Hall



Age- 18

Disability- Cerebral Palsy

Location- Honeybrook, PA

Activities- Lewis has been involved in wheelchair sports for several years. He plays wheelchair basketball and wheelchair rugby. He has competed in the Devon Horse Show for twelve years and has won numerous awards. He also holds a green belt in Ti-Kwon-Do.

Alexa Brill



Age- 18

Disability- Cerebral Palsy

Location- Mechanicsburg, PA

Activities- Alexa was involved in ice hockey for 4 years. She served as the team's statistician. She will be attending Edinboro University in the fall as a Freshman. In her free time she likes to create canvas paintings. Alexa is a new member to the PYLN governing board.

Mike Matthews



Age- 27

Disability- Cerebral Palsy

Location- Washington, PA

Activities- Mike is a youth pastor and is actively involved in his church. He also lends his talents to Tri-county Patriots for Independent Living's (TRIPIL), a center for independent living, and has been part of their efforts to get 100% of Washington county's polling places accessible. This year he will lead TRIPIL's youth group.

PYLN Adult Allies

Adult allies support the work of the PYLN and follow the leadership and vision of its members.

Michael Stoehr

Title- Educational Consultant

Employer- The Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PATTaN)

Location- Pittsburgh, PA

Joan Kester

Title- Human Resource Development Specialist

Employer- The George Washington University, Mid-Atlantic Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program

Location- Mount Joy, PA (Lancaster)

Linda Loar

Title- Parent Advocate

Employer- Parent Education Network

Location- Pittsburgh, PA

Marty Kester

Title- Disability Advocate

Employer- Retired Bureau Director, PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

Location- Mount Joy, PA (Lancaster)



Phase One:

ACCEPT YOURSELF!

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Accepting my disability: Allison's story



I have to admit, I've never really had much trouble accepting my disability. I was born three months premature, and as a result, I am

totally blind. However, my family and friends never treated me differently because of my disability. From my earliest memories, I was just an ordinary kid, allowed to play, run, and fall just like anyone else. I was always encouraged to do well in school, and learned to read and write Braille very quickly. I always managed to keep up with my sighted classmates, and therefore, I never felt different or singled out. I was teased by some of my peers who didn't understand my blindness or my capabilities, but no more so than the other kids.

My family has a lot to do with my acceptance of my disability because they always treated me normally and gave me the same responsibilities as my siblings.

However, my vision and mobility instructors also played a major role in helping me to succeed. They encouraged me to learn everything I could, and not to settle for less because of my disability. I learned from a young age that the ability to travel independently would lead to greater overall independence. I was also encouraged to participate in my IEP, believing that my future was my own, and that it was important for me to work with others and advocate for myself in order to ensure that my individual goals were met.

Through the constant support of friends, family, and teachers, I had an easy time accepting my disability. Being involved in every aspect of my future plans has made me more confident and aware of myself as a person with a disability. My greatest wish is to help others accept their disabilities through my example.

Accepting my Disability: Lewis's Story



I was born three months early, weighing in at two pounds. Being born premature, I acquired the disability that is called Cerebral Palsy, which is a disability that affects the use of my legs and arms. I use a wheelchair to move around. Living with cerebral palsy has been a struggle at times but I have learned how to live with it. I have gained far more than I have lost by having Cerebral Palsy. Having a physical disability is not the end of the world. I have had the opportunity to meet many

great people and I have traveled all over the United States playing wheelchair sports.

I play wheelchair basketball and wheelchair rugby. Playing sports has given me the opportunity to accept my disability and compete on an equal playing field. I like playing on a team with other people that are similar to myself. My rugby team has even won a national title. My Basketball team has also had the chance to compete for a national championship. Playing sports has allowed me to learn about and accept my disability.

Accepting My disability: Kelly's story



For much of my life, my invisible disability was invisible to even me. Nowadays, a diagnosis for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is almost

commonplace, but when I was in elementary school, it was practically unheard of in my small hometown. As I recall my childhood education from the perspective of being an adult, I can remember the numerous times that I felt slow and un-intelligent. It wasn't until high school that I finally was given a test that measured my I.Q. My score was quite high, but my "Processing Speed" was lower. It finally made sense to me: I understood the information that my brain was processing, just at a different pace. With this new breakthrough, I no longer felt the embarrassment and guilt that can accompany situations like asking a teacher for additional time on a test, or asking someone to repeat what they have just said. With the accommodation of understanding and patience from my teachers, I excelled at school, even earning the Honor Roll throughout high school and the Deans List in college. Ever since I was diagnosed with ADD,

and later with Anxiety Disorder, I've strived to never make excuses for my disability. I've accepted it, and request others to do the same. I have learned to not only "cope" with having ADD, but to embrace it and succeed in learning, despite my disability. On the surface I may appear to be absent minded, but to search a little deeper is to realize a mind that is awake and devoted to the art and philosophy and math and music and all of the things that I plan on continuing to learn about for the rest of my life. A person that seeks to gain as much knowledge and wisdom as possible in her lifetime sure sounds different from a little girl who can't finish a math quiz by the end of class. Now, how's that for a Learning Disability?

Nowadays, my disabilities are so normal to me. I am actually surprised when someone points it out. Living as an adult with a disability is no easier than doing so as a student—I still struggle to pay attention and suffer the occasional panic attack—but experience has taught me that I am capable of accommodating my shortcomings and achieving my goals. Graduating from college with honors was an example of a recent goal realized. Being a person with a disability has given

me the strength, perspective, and character it takes to overcome the obstacles that may block my life's path, and be the person I strive to be. You may interpret this feeling I have towards my disability as pride, and you would be correct. I'm thankful for the

blessing of my disability, because it makes me stronger each day. These days, things keep getting better. I am happy to have recently married someone who knows and accepts me with as much ease as I've learned to accept myself.

So you have a disability

Definition of disability

The Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network (PYLN) accepts the Integrative Model of Disability. People with disabilities may have some limitation or illness that may not allow them to fully participate in certain areas of daily living (such as problems with walking, writing, reading, or anxiety.) However, many of the barriers that people with disabilities face are due to the inaccessible environments and negative beliefs that exist about people with disabilities.

You might have heard the saying that no two snowflakes are alike. The same thing can be said about a person with a disability. People with disabilities have many different characteristics. Each person may need different accommodations (or help), even if they have the same disability.

Most disabilities fall into one of five groups:

1. *Physical Disability:* People with this type of disability may have difficulties with moving or mobility. They may use assisted devices such as wheelchairs or walkers. Example: Muscular Dystrophy
2. *Sensory Disability:* People with this type of disability may have difficulty hearing or seeing, or both. Individuals with visual impairments may use Braille, canes, or large print to assist them. People who are hard of hearing or deaf may use hearing aids or cochlear implants and/or use sign language. Example: Deaf or Blind
3. *Cognitive Disability:* People with this type of disability may have difficulty learning, communicating, and remembering information. They may also have trouble with problem-solving, paying attention, or understanding reading, math, or visual information. They may use daily planners, more time on tests, or quiet areas to study. Example: Down Syndrome
4. *Psychiatric and Emotional Disability:* People with these types of disabilities may have difficulty with emotions, feelings, and behaviors. Often these individuals

are diagnosed with Depressive Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, Psychotic Disorder, and/or Mood Disorder. People with this type of disability may use medications, coping skills, or counseling. Example: Manic Depression and/or Anxiety Disorder

5. *Health-Related Disability:* People with this type of disability might have a physical condition that affects their overall health. They may have limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, rheumatic fever, asthma, hemophilia, and leukemia.

Things to never forget

Your disability is not a bad thing!

Your disability is a part of you but it does not define who you are as a person. You need to fully understand what your disability means to you and how it affects your life. If you let it get you down, you will never be able to make your dreams come true.

Everyone has things they are good and bad at in life. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Everyone has things they are good at and things that they are not so good at. It is important to understand what you are good at, and what you aren't good at so that you can do things that allow your talents to show. Find out what you are really good at and like to do and go for it!

Keep a positive attitude!

There are going to be times in life that you get frustrated with your disability. It is important to know that this is a part of life, and with a little patience you will find the light at the end of the tunnel. Do not let your disability get in the way of the dreams that you have set for yourself.

Guess what... you have a disability

Part of accepting yourself means knowing that you have a disability and understanding what it means to you in your life! The next worksheet will help you to understand what your disability is and will give you helpful tips to get to know your disability... Many people with disabilities notice that they have barriers they need to overcome unlike their friends without disabilities. Knowing that you are different can make you uncomfortable about yourself, and possibly get in the way of your success.



Getting to know yourself

Worksheet: Questions to help you get to know yourself and your disability

The PYLN knows how important it is to accept your disability and understand how it impacts your life. Answering these questions should help you get a better understanding of yourself and the role your disability plays in your life and future.

1. What is your disability?
2. Describe what barriers your disability presents to you.
3. Describe your strengths
4. What are your weaknesses?
5. How do you learn best? (Do you learn by seeing, hearing, or actually doing something?)
6. What kind of help do you get at school so that you can do your best?
7. What kind of things do you think you still need to improve on? (examples: time management and organization)

Help is out there

Understanding your accommodations and supports

Accommodations are so important!

You may be asking yourself "what are accommodations"? Hopefully this will help you understand what they are and how they help you.

The definition of accommodations is: Supports that help you succeed at a given task. Schools and colleges are required to give you the accommodations you need while in school. It is important to know what accommodations you are getting now so that you can ask for them and succeed in the future. As an adult, you are expected to know what you need and what your accommodations are; people are not going to be able to read your mind

Some examples of accommodations are:

- ✓ Extended time to finish tests
- ✓ Wheelchair Ramps
- ✓ Braille Menu at a restaurant
- ✓ Assistance in reading a book or a test
- ✓ Books on tape
- ✓ Large print handouts
- ✓ TV monitor connected to microscope to enlarge images
- ✓ Class assignments made available in electronic format
- ✓ "Real-time" captioning
- ✓ Audio-taped class sessions
- ✓ Computer with voice output,
- ✓ Computer with spellchecker and grammar checker
- ✓ Adjustable tables; lab equipment located within reach
- ✓ Reasonable adjustments with attendance policy



Worksheet: What are some of the accommodations you get to help you succeed in school? How do they help you?

1.

2.

3

4.

Note: If you do not know what accommodations you receive, ask your teacher or ask to read your IEP or 504 plan. That way you know what accommodations you have and are eligible to use.

Your health is important!

Once you turn 18 you are considered an adult by your doctors.

You need to be knowledgeable about what your medical needs are:

- ✓ Know how to explain your disability
- ✓ Know what medications you take, how much to take, and when to take them
- ✓ Know your medical history

Who to talk to about your disability - working with trusted adults

Becoming aware that you have a disability can be scary. However, you do not want to ignore the fact that you have a disability. Naturally you are going to have questions about what your disability is, and what it means for your life. This next worksheet lists people you can talk to so that you can gain more knowledge about what your disability is.



Activity

Worksheet: Learning about your disability

People you should ask about your disability:

- ✓ Family (Parents or Guardian)
- ✓ Teachers or counselors you trust
- ✓ Your Doctor
- ✓ Search the Internet
- ✓ Go to the library

Questions you can ask these people:

1) What is the name of my disability?

2) What does it mean?

3) How does it affect me?

4) What supports or accommodations do I get to help me?

So now that you know that you have a disability and what it consists of, you can begin to explain it to others. It may be awkward to tell people at first about your disability, but understand that you do not need to tell everyone right away.

People you should educate about your disability:

- ✓ Parents and Extended Family (If they don't already know)
- ✓ Close friends or girlfriend or boyfriend
- ✓ Teachers
- ✓ Employers (in some cases)
- ✓ Colleges, universities and other training programs

It is important to know how to explain your disability because you are going to need to do throughout your adult life. It is a part of you but not all of you!

Sometimes you feel like you just don't fit in

Using the problem solving method

So you think you have a problem? What do you do to solve it? Here is a list of steps to follow to help solve your problem.

- 1) Determine the problem- Is there a problem?
- 2) Define the problem- What is the problem?
- 3) Generate options- What could I do to solve this problem?
- 4) Evaluate the options- Out of all of the options, which is the best?
- 5) Make a plan- Now that I have an option, what is a plan to carry it out?
- 6) Try it out- Now, put your plan into action.
- 7) Evaluate and restart- Did my actions work? Did the problem go away? Is it still there? If it is still there restart the problem solving method and choose another option to try.



WORKSHEET: Problem solving methods

Use this worksheet to help you solve problems you may have. It's okay to ask people you trust to help you learn this skill. You can use it for the rest of your life!

- 1) Is there a problem?

- 2) What is my problem?

- 3) What could I do to solve this problem?

- 4) Out of all my options to solve the problem, which is the best?

- 5) Now that I've decided on how to solve my problem, how do I make it happen?

- 6) Take steps and action to carry out my plan.

- 7) Is my plan working, did my problem go away? If not, restart this process and try another way.

Common problems in social situations

Always make an effort to be social, because friends and family can support you through a lot of good and hard times in your life! Attitudes of others and other factors which may inhibit your social Life:

- Fear
- Ignorance
- Pity
- Hate
- Lower expectations
- Superiority
- Charity

In summary, people may focus more on your disability than your abilities! Things that may affect your social interactions:

- Inferiority
- Self- Pity
- Lack of self confidence or advocacy
- Fear
- Lack of knowledge or awareness
- Lack of encouragement to get involved
- Other factors that affect your social life:
 - Lack of transportation
 - Lack of a good support network at home

Remember, there are many accommodations that can help you live your life:

- ✓ Wheelchair use--ramps, elevators
- ✓ hearing impairments—interpreters, close captioning
- ✓ Visual impairments—Braille, taped, or electronic copies of written information which can be read by screen readers
- ✓ Written communication—voice activated systems, computers
- ✓ Transportation—accessible vehicles, ACCESS
- ✓ Aids like service dogs and personal care attendants



Worksheet: Social issues: 10 sample questions and answers

To help you work through social issues you may experience, here are a few examples for you to think about and answer. It might be helpful to use your problem solving skills. In the blanks at the end of samples, list any social issues you may have and think about how you can solve them. We'll start with an example:

Q: I love to meet new people, but I have Social Anxiety Disorder and get extremely nervous in large groups. How do I find a way to meet new people but also avoid these crowds?

A: A good way to meet new people is finding a common interest group to get involved in. While social gatherings at school can be congested, an independent group may be much smaller and more relaxed. An additional bonus is that these people have the same interests as you, so it will be easy to strike up a conversation and make new friends! Whether your interests involve things like art or sports, or even church or volunteering in your community, there are usually several clubs and organizations to become a part of, without the hassle of large crowds.

Q: I just received an awesome new laptop for my birthday! It's perfect, except that I can't use it! I have a visual disability and do not have the software necessary to use it. Where do I find this software, so that I can connect with all of my online friends?

A:

Q: My friend invited me to his birthday party at his house in a week. I'd love to go, but my family and none of my friends are able to drive me. I am not able to drive myself because of my physical disability. How can I still see my friend when I have no way to get to his house?

A:

Q: My best friend and I have a common love: movies. We love watching all of the newest films that come out. But one of my friend's favorite things to do is to go out to the movies and see the newest releases. I usually use closed captioning because of my hearing impairment, but in the movie theater, there seems to be no such thing! Are there any resources for me?

A:

Q: I have lots of friends and love hanging out with them at lunch. The only problem is that, at the next table a couple of boys are always laughing and making fun of me for having Down's syndrome. I usually just tell them to shut up, but this doesn't usually work and I just go and sit at another table. I know that I should be able to sit wherever I want at lunch, so how do I deal with these boys?

A:

Q: I have muscular dystrophy, a physical disability requiring the use of a wheelchair, and have wanted to visit a coffee shop that many of my friends go to, but I am unable to because of a small set of stairs which lead to its door. How can I join my friends at this location?

A:

Q: I made the school play! I am so excited because I love theater and I am a very talented actor, but being in a play also requires something that is not very easy for me: memorizing lines. The director just told the cast that we are on a tight schedule for practices, and that we must have all of our lines memorized in 3 weeks! Because of my learning disability, Dyslexia, it is very difficult for me to memorize my lines, and I have a lot of them. I'm nervous to talk to the director about this, because I'm afraid he will cut me, and theater is my absolute favorite thing. How do I talk to him about my issues?

A:

Q: I am a guy who loves sports. My friends and I always watch rugby, and love talking about it. A couple of my friends tried out for our school's team, and made it! I am really happy for them, but I have always wanted to play sports myself, and cannot make the school's team because my Cerebral Palsy requires me to use a wheelchair. Are there any opportunities for a guy like me?

A:

Q:

A:

Q:

A:

Q:

A:

It's all about you! Tips to get the most out of assessments

Assessment: Everett's Story



I wish I would have known about how assessments work and what I could have done to improve my

experience during the assessment process that took place over my entire education.

In kindergarten, I transferred schools. In order to be enrolled in regular education classes, I had to take an IQ test. I took the test and got a score of 114 and people felt that it could not be true because I had a disability. So I had to take the test again and the results came back virtually the same. I was then enrolled in regular education classrooms, which opened many opportunities for me. I realize that people made assumptions about my intelligence, just because I walked funny.

I started taking career assessments in high school to help me find a career path. However, most of the assessments that I did suggested jobs that I knew were not accessible to people that use wheelchairs. This was very disheartening to me because I felt

that these assessments were pointless. This led me to have a negative attitude towards high school and I thought of dropping out. I only was excited about graduating when I realized that college was an option for me.

When in high school, I had to take standardized tests like the PSSA and SAT. I became increasingly frustrated with the limited time I had to complete the tests. I wish that I had known about the accommodations that could have been available to someone like me. I believe that it would have improved my scores and taken away some of my worries about taking such scary tests.

Now that I am in college, I have made a decision about what my career is going to be. I would like to be a high school teacher in the hopes of exposing students to the abilities of other young people with disabilities and helping them learn to accept differences just by being around me as their teacher.

When exploring a career, I first thought I wanted to be a Dr. Phil type (psychiatrist), because I liked helping my friends with their relationships and social issues. So I went into college as a

psychology major and realized that all it did was make me worry about myself and my own mental health. And after all this thinking, I realized that life was passing me by and I wanted to find something that truly lit a fire in my heart.

Sometimes assessment happens through relationships with adult mentors and volunteer experiences. Through my experience with the PA Youth

Leadership Network, I have been exposed to many education professionals and realized that I am cut out of the same mold as many of them, and share the same passions. Through my volunteer work with PYLN I get a rush from working with youth and seeing the impact I can have on their lives. I would love to do this every day, as a teacher, when I finish college.

Assessment: Joe's Story



When I was in first grade, I was put through a bunch of assessments because of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. I didn't really

understand what was going on because I was so young, but my parents thought that these tests would be beneficial to me.

I was sent for testing in 11th and 12th grade when I got connected with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. I went to a psychologist and went through a tough, three-hour assessment. I was very agitated because I had just finished school that day and had to go to work after the test. When I told the psychologist that I wanted to be a public official, he said it wouldn't be a good choice because you have to go to college and he didn't think that was an option for me. This made me feel that I wasn't going to amount to anything and I felt that I was going to be someone with a disability, letting life pass me by. When the report came back I met with the psychologist and the jobs that came back were janitor, cook and nursing

assistant. I didn't want to do any of these jobs. I felt that I needed to go find my own job and forgot about the assessment. This is an example of how assessment should not go, because it is to help generate options, not limit them.

I have learned a lot about myself through my volunteer experience with the Greenfield Organization. I worked on numerous agency projects such as putting together a newsletter, doing set-up for fundraising events, and helping to raise money. This experience showed me how to work with people and becoming a leader. Through feedback, I learned that I have a very good personality and am a person who is happy when I am helping people.

Through my volunteer experience with the PA Youth Leadership Network, it showed me a lot about being a disability advocate and how to advocate for people who do not have a voice. Now I volunteer much of my time helping advocate for people with disabilities. I learned that someone with a disability is to be in charge of their own life, not just to be told what to do.

What is assessment? Why should you care?

Assessment is all about learning about what you can do in life. It's a process that you go through to try to map out your future. Assessment is a very important part of your transition plan because it helps you:

- ✓ get concrete ideas about what you want to do
- ✓ plan your next steps are
- ✓ learn about yourself
- ✓ challenges you to think about yourself
- ✓ understand your interests
- ✓ know your strengths
- ✓ learn about your needs and accommodations that might help
- ✓ plan for your future goals.

What assessment accommodations can you get?

Accommodations are changes to a classroom or work site that enables you to learn, work and show off your skills. Sometimes you need to ask for accommodations on assessments when you feel it will help you do your best. Accommodations can be things like asking for extra time on a test, using a calculator, having a reader or a note taker or having an accessible work area. There are usually rules about how to get accommodations and you need to find out what they are.

What is the difference between formal and informal assessments?

There are two ways of doing assessment - formal and informal. Formal assessments are tests that are scored and help you understand where you stand compared to others. Informal assessments can be done by a variety of people like your teacher, counselor, family member, your boss or yourself. Information can be collected through a survey, someone watching you, or having you experience work in different settings (school, volunteer, paid work). You can learn a lot about yourself by trying a lot of different things in different places.

What can you expect from a formal assessment?

Formal assessments are where you take a test; it's not just to get you out of class for the day. Sometimes when you are scheduled to take a formal assessment, you will be taking more than one test at a time. Whenever you participate in an assessment, it is important to understand why you're doing it and what it can do for you. Before you take it, ask the following questions:

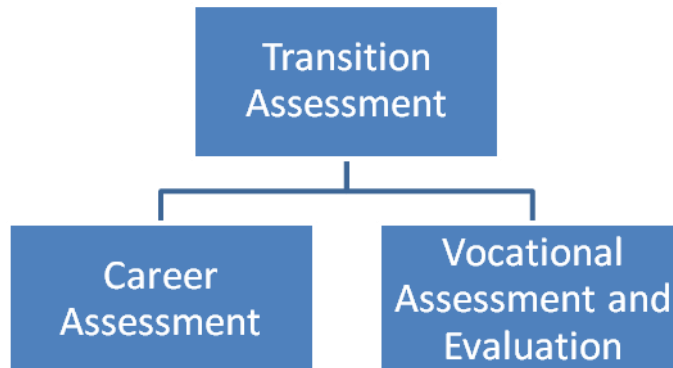
- 1) What is this for?
- 2) How can it help me?
- 3) What is the test like?
- 4) How long will the test take?
- 5) Am I allowed accommodations?
- 6) How will I learn about the results of the test?

When you are scheduled for the assessment, make sure you have had a good night's sleep and a good meal. Make sure you know how long you'll be there, how you're going to get there and what accommodations you are going to be given. During the test, it is important for you to ask questions if you do not understand something.

Within a few weeks after the formal assessment you should meet with someone you trust to review the results of the assessment. This information is to help you understand your strengths and needs and to come up with ideas to be used in your IEP and post school goals.

What are the different types of assessments?

Transition assessment looks at your whole life. Career assessment helps you plan for your career throughout your lifetime. Vocational assessment and evaluation help you understand yourself as a worker. This chart shows the relationship between the different types of assessment:



What is transition assessment?

Transition assessment looks at every part of your life by seeing you as a student, a worker, a friend, a family member and a person who lives in a neighborhood. It helps you look at what supports you may need to reach your goals in life. It helps you identify your strengths, needs, what you like the most and your interests.



Worksheet: Transition assessment

Here are some questions to help you think about different parts of your life. These transition assessment questions can help you plan for your future:

1) How would you describe your home and family life?

a) What do you do for yourself?

b) How do you help your family (chores, laundry, dogs, etc.)?

c) How much does your family help you?

d) Are there things you could do on your own to be more independent?

2) What do you do to stay healthy?

a) Do you exercise or play sports?

b) What are your eating habits like?

c) Do you manage your own medications, if you take any?

d) Do you know how to set up your own doctors' appointments?

3) What do you do for fun?

- a) What sports do you play?
- b) What clubs are you in school?
- c) What music do you like?
- d) What do you do in your spare time?
- e) What hobbies do you have?
- f) Do you do any volunteer work with any organization that interests you?
- g) Do you help out in your neighborhood (neighborhood clean-up, helping with elderly, etc.)?

4) What are your relationships like?

- a) Do you have what you would call "close friends"?
- b) How do you get along with your family?
- c) Do you have a girlfriend or boyfriend?
- d) Are you able to talk to people about your problems?
- e) Are you able to communicate your feelings well?
- f) Do you get along well with adults?

5) How do you plan for your future?

- a) What do you do in school to plan for your future?
- b) What are your goals in life?
- c) Do you know how to budget your money?
- d) Do you use your time wisely?

6) Who runs your life?

- a) Are you making your own decisions?
- b) Are you doing what you really want to do in life?
- c) Do you talk about your future with your family?
- d) How do you deal with disagreements about your future with other people?

7) How are you preparing for your future career? Do you want to go on to school after high school?

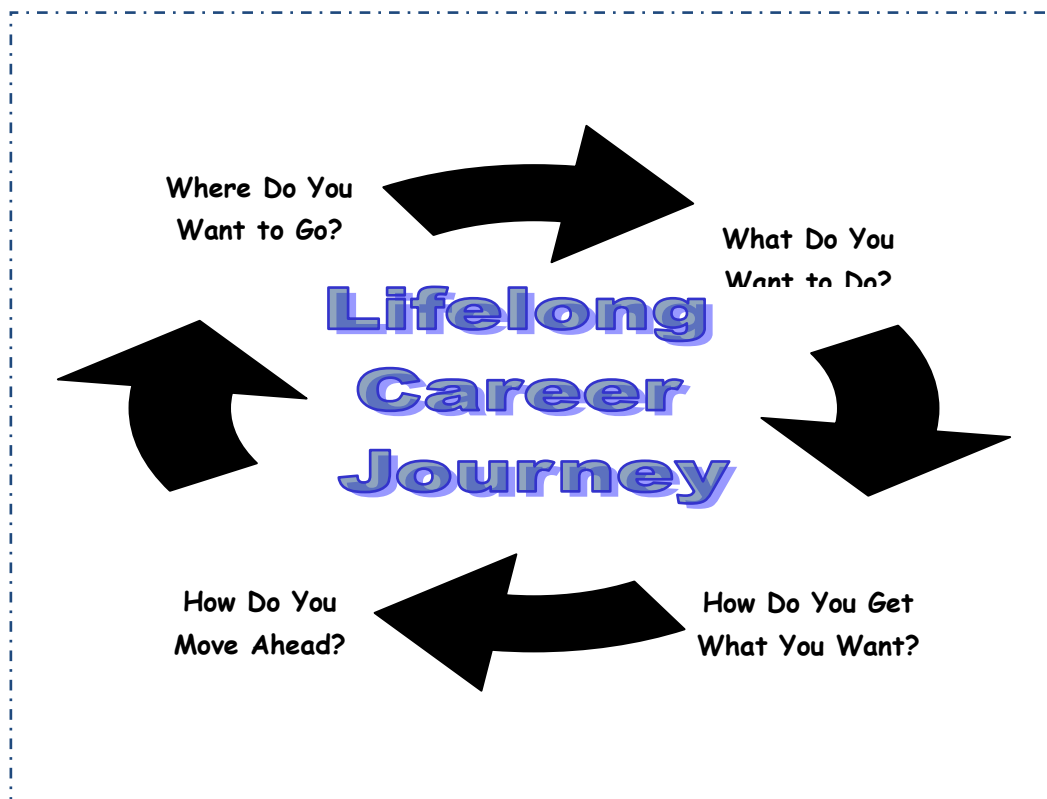
- a) Career assessment, vocational assessment, and evaluation can help you plan for your future (see information below).

Vocational Assessment and Evaluation

Vocational assessment and evaluation looks at you as a worker. The best way to learn about you as a worker is to do work in different places. During these experiences, it's important for you and those who are helping you (boss, teacher, job coach, counselor, or family member) to collect information on how you do in different settings. This can help you gain good experience that can help you make a good career choice. The different places you can experience work include: in school, in your town working for a company, volunteering, internships and summer work.

Lifelong career journey

Career assessment is another part of transition assessment and it deals with plans for your career throughout your lifetime. We all go through four stages of planning for our careers throughout our lives, which include awareness, exploration, preparation and adjustment.





Activity

Worksheet: Lifelong career journey

Here are some questions to help you along your lifelong career journey.

Special thanks to Dr. Pam Leconte from The George Washington University for giving us permission to adapt the checklist from Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, & Leconte. (2nd edition). (2007). Assess for Success: A practitioner's guide for transition assessment. CA: Sage Publications (Permission received from Dr. Leconte to reproduce for educational purposes only)

Where do you want to go?

- ✓ Why do people work? Why do you want to work?
- ✓ What are some jobs you know about?
- ✓ What kind of work do people do on these jobs?
- ✓ What have you dreamed of doing when you finish school?
- ✓ What kind of job do you want?
- ✓ Where do you want to live, and with whom, when you are grown up?
- ✓ What do you enjoy doing when you are not in school?
- ✓ What jobs do your mother, father, and other family members have?
- ✓ What types of things do they do on their jobs?
- ✓ What is college? Why do people go to college? What is vocational training?
- ✓ What is public transportation? How would you get there you want to go if your parents did not drive you?
- ✓ What is voting?

What do you want to do?

- ✓ What jobs are you interested in visiting?
- ✓ What hobbies do you have?
- ✓ What activities do you do in your spare time?
- ✓ What volunteer or community service work do you do?
- ✓ If you have had a summer job, did you enjoy it? What parts did you like best?
- ✓ Do you like being inside or outside better?
- ✓ Do you prefer being with other people, or do you enjoy being by yourself?
- ✓ Do you enjoy working with your hands and with tools, or do you prefer to solve problems in your head?
- ✓ Did you get along well with your classmates? If so, why did you? If not, why didn't you?
- ✓ What skills do you have that you can use in these or other courses?
- ✓ How do you get what you want?
- ✓ What courses do you need to take to get ready for your job?
- ✓ Will you need to take courses during high school and after to get ready for the job?
- ✓ What things will you need to get into these courses?
- ✓ How will you prepare to live on your own?
- ✓ Do you and your family plan for you to attend college or other training?
- ✓ How will you gain the skills needed to succeed in college or other training?
- ✓ Will you be able to get a job based on your high school and/or college coursework?

- ✓ Does the school or college help you find a job?

How do you move ahead?

- ✓ Can you continue your training and education after you start to work?
- ✓ Does the employer help pay for extra schooling?
- ✓ How can you get promoted at your company?
- ✓ What benefits does your company offer (insurance, vacation, retirement)?
- ✓ What will you do if you get laid off or lose your job?
- ✓ Do you have options to take classes in areas that you enjoy (hobbies)?
- ✓ Can you transfer your job skills to another company, if needed?

Understanding your strengths and talents

What is a strength? A strength is something you are naturally good at, also called an ability. For those of us with disabilities, our strengths are often overlooked because people might focus on our disability, rather than our abilities. Sometimes we will have different strengths than most people, but these abilities are just as important.

Perhaps some of you are already thinking about strengths that you know you have. But others of you might be wondering, "Do I even have any strengths"? Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and everyone has something positive to contribute to their community. People can have all different types of strengths. Some people may have physical strengths (like being good at sports), or mental strengths (like problem-solving or being good at math.) Other people have moral strengths, which makes them good at determining right and wrong. Below is a list that might help you to figure out what your strengths are.



Worksheet: Self-assessment quiz: knowing your strengths

Knowing what your strengths are can help you to discover what kind of job you might be best at. Figuring out what you want to do begins with knowing yourself. The better you understand your own wants and needs, the better you will be able to make decisions about your career goals and dreams. This self-assessment inventory can help.

Check how good you think you are at the following activities. For each strength listed below, you can check if you are "Really Good at This", "OK at This", or "Not Very Good at This" to describe how good you think you are at doing these things.

I am:	Really Good At This	OK At This	Not Very Good At This
Sports How are you using this ability?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<hr/>			
Working with other people How are you using this ability?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<hr/>			
Working with animals How are you using this ability?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<hr/>			
Working or exploring outdoors How are you using this ability?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<hr/>			

Giving others advice
How are you using this ability?

Math
How are you using this ability?

Reading
How are you using this ability?

Music
How are you using this ability?

Science
How are you using this ability?

Art
How are you using this ability?

Computers
How are you using this ability?

Drama/ Theater
How are you using this ability?

Mechanics
How are you using this ability?

Making decisions
How are you using this ability?

Managing money
How are you using this ability?

Communicating
How are you using this ability?

Spelling and Vocabulary
How are you using this ability?

Directions and understanding maps
How are you using this ability?

Gardening/ Agriculture
How are you using this ability?

Writing
How are you using this ability?

Exercise

How are you using this ability?

Politics

How are you using this ability?

Ethics

How are you using this ability?

Helping and caring for others

How are you using this ability?

Imagining

How are you using this ability?

Housework and cleaning

How are you using this ability?

Decorating

How are you using this ability?

Working with my hands
(Building and putting things together)

How are you using this ability?

Cooking
How are you using this ability?

Time management
How are you using this ability?

Organizing
How are you using this ability?

Crafts
How are you using this ability?

Memorization
How are you using this ability?

Other- _____
How are you using this ability?

Other- _____
How are you using this ability?

Other- _____
How are you using this ability?

Understanding your weaknesses: learning about the supports that can help

Okay, so now that we know what your strengths are, let's ask ourselves another question: what is a weakness? Perhaps there are certain things you aren't as good at. These things would be described as your weaknesses. However, there is something really cool about weaknesses: sometimes they can help you grow in ways you never would have guessed. For example, a person who uses a wheelchair because they have trouble walking may have improved upper body strength from pushing the wheelchair. This changes this person's disability in one area to ability in another area. It is important to see the positive parts of every situation. Go back and look over the worksheets you just completed to help you answer these questions.



Worksheet: Understanding your weaknesses and the supports you need

What skills might you need to improve?

What accommodations and supports could you use to improve on your weaknesses?

Knowing your interests: Helping you plan for your future

The first step to thinking about our future is what we like or what we are interested in. This information can help you explore jobs and careers, as well as training after you complete high school.



Worksheet: Knowing your Interests

Check the areas that most interest you. After you're finished circle your top ten.

- Providing a practical service for people
- Self-expression in music, art, literature, or nature
- Organizing and record keeping
- Meeting people and supervising others
- Helping others in need, either mentally, spiritually, or physically
- Solving practical problems
- Working in forestry, farming, or fishing
- Working with machines and tools
- Taking care of animals
- Physical work outdoors
- Protecting the public via law enforcement or fire fighting
- Selling, advertising or promoting

Circle True (T) or False (F) for the following questions

T	F	I get satisfaction not from personal accomplishment, but from helping others.
T	F	I'd like to have a job in which I can use my imagination and be inventive.
T	F	In my life, money will be placed ahead of job security and personal interests.
T	F	It is my ambition to have a direct impact on other people's lives.
T	F	I am not a risk-taker and would prefer a career that offers little risk.
T	F	I enjoy working with people rather than by myself.
T	F	I would not be happy doing the same thing all the time.

What matters most to you?

For each item check the box that says how important each item is to you.

This is:	Really Important To Me	Somewhat Important To Me	Not Important To Me
Good health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Justice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage/family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Faith	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fame	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Beauty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accomplishment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seeing the world	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

This is:	Really Important To Me	Somewhat Important To Me	Not Important To Me
Love	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Power	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individualism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friendship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Honor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intelligence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wealth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Worksheet: Celebrate your Strengths

Take the time to celebrate who you are and how far you have come. Each one of us is created special and unique (one of a kind). We all have something important to give to the world, so let your strengths show.

- 1) Review your strengths

- 2) Find a good listener to help you review everything you have done. It's helpful to have other people give you input, since it's sometimes hard to be objective about yourself.

- 3) Discuss work and non-work projects you have been involved in over the last 5 years.

- 4) Regularly review your strengths

- 5) Make a list of your strengths and read it to yourself regularly, adding to it as you go.

- 6) Praise yourself for what you have achieved.

- 7) Review your strengths whenever you are feeling particularly defeated.

What does this all mean to you? Pulling it all together!

In this section you have learned a lot about what assessment is and how it can help you in your transition planning and lifelong career journey. Since assessment is always happening throughout your transition process, how do you keep track of it all? Here's an idea on how you can do that.

Portfolios

Portfolios are a collection of assessment information about you. They can help you communicate what your dreams, goals, interests and abilities are to people who can help you get to where you want to go. Portfolios can help you grow by learning about yourself, by putting your assessment information all in one place. You are in control of your portfolio and can include anything you feel that is important in telling your story. Some examples of information to put in your portfolio would be: background information, writing your story or journal, job history, samples of your work, video clips of you working, and assessment information. Portfolios can be kept in an electronic form or in a binder. Sometimes people use PowerPoint to create their Portfolio. Pick the way that works best for you. Don't forget, you are in the driver's seat!

Build your portfolio through your years in school. To start, use the worksheets you completed from this Toolkit. It will help you plan for your future. It can be shared with your family, teachers, OVR counselor and other agencies that can support you. Some information can be used to show your talents and abilities to employers.

Summary of Performance

Another document to help you pull together information you need to plan for your future when you leave high school is called a summary of performance. In Pennsylvania this summary is called a *Summary of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance*. Your teacher will complete this form with you prior to leaving school.

There are four parts to a summary of performance:

Part 1 includes general information about you, such as your name, address and contact information.

Part 2 includes information about your academic levels in reading, math, etc. and accommodations you received in school. Also included is assessment information in the following goal areas and accommodations you use: career/jobs; social skills and behaviors; and your ability to live and do things on your own (budgeting money, laundry, shopping, etc). Ideas are given on what you might want to think about in your future plans.

Part 3 focuses on your goals in the following three areas:

- ✓ Postsecondary education and training (college or tech school goals)
- ✓ Employment (career and job goals)
- ✓ Independent living (where you want to live, transportation, money)

This section also gives you suggestions about next steps, agencies that might be able to help you, their contact information and ideas on how they may be able to help.

Part 4, which is optional, gives you a chance to voice your opinion in the following areas:

- ✓ What things that have helped you do well in school (accommodations, supports, services, equipment)?
- ✓ What accommodations and supports worked best for you?
- ✓ What do others need to know about you to help you achieve your goals?

In summary

Phase One: Accept Yourself!

Reality check

The definition of disability

The five general categories of disabilities

1. *Physical disability:* People with this type of disability may have difficulties with movement or mobility. They may use assisted devices such as wheelchairs or walkers.
2. *Sensory disability:* People with this type of disability may have difficulty hearing or seeing, or both. Individuals with visual impairments may use Braille, canes, or large print to assist them. People who are hard of hearing or deaf may use hearing aids or cochlear implants.
3. *Cognitive disability:* People with this type of disability may have difficulty learning, communicating, and remembering information. They may also have trouble with problem-solving, paying attention, or understanding reading, math, or visual information. They may use daily planners, more time on tests, or quiet areas to study.
4. *Psychiatric and emotional disability:* People with these types of disabilities may have difficulty with emotions and behaviors. Often these individuals are diagnosed with Depressive Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, Psychotic Disorder, and/or Mood Disorder. People with this type of disability may use medications, coping skills, or counseling.
5. *Health-related disability:* People with this type of disability might have a physical condition that affects their overall health. They may have limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, rheumatic fever, asthma, hemophilia, and leukemia.

Things to never forget!

- ✓ Having a disability is not a bad thing
- ✓ Know your strengths and weaknesses
- ✓ Stay positive 😊

Guess what... you have a disability

Part of accepting yourself is knowing that you have a disability and how it affects your life.

Want to learn about your disability? Here are some places you can go

- ✓ Your Parents
- ✓ Your Teachers
- ✓ The Internet (Google it!)
- ✓ Go to the Library!

Accommodations -- what are they?

The definition of accommodation is: Things that help you succeed at a given task. Your high school is required to give you the accommodations you need. Colleges and employers will help; you just have to let them know what you need. Once you are in college or working it is up to you to get the supports you need.

Examples:

- ✓ Extended test time
- ✓ Braille Menus at a restaurant
- ✓ Assistance in reading a book or a test
- ✓ Books on tape

Don't let your disability negatively affect your social life!

Just because you have a disability doesn't mean you can't get out and do things. A lot of youth with disabilities are afraid of being social because they:

- Feel different or stupid
- Feel sorry for themselves
- Lack self confidence
- Feel like people will be mean to them or pity them

Always make an effort to be social, because friends and family can support you through a lot of hard times in your life!



Review Questions: Phase One

To help you learn about the things we covered in Phase I, answer these questions:

- 1) Looking back over the five categories of disability which one do you belong to?

- 2) To be ready to talk to other people about your disability, write down a brief description.

- 3) How can you remain positive about having a disability?

- 4) What is an accommodation, and what are some accommodations that you use often?

- 5) Do you sometimes find it difficult to be social? If so, what are some ways that you help yourself be more confident around other people?

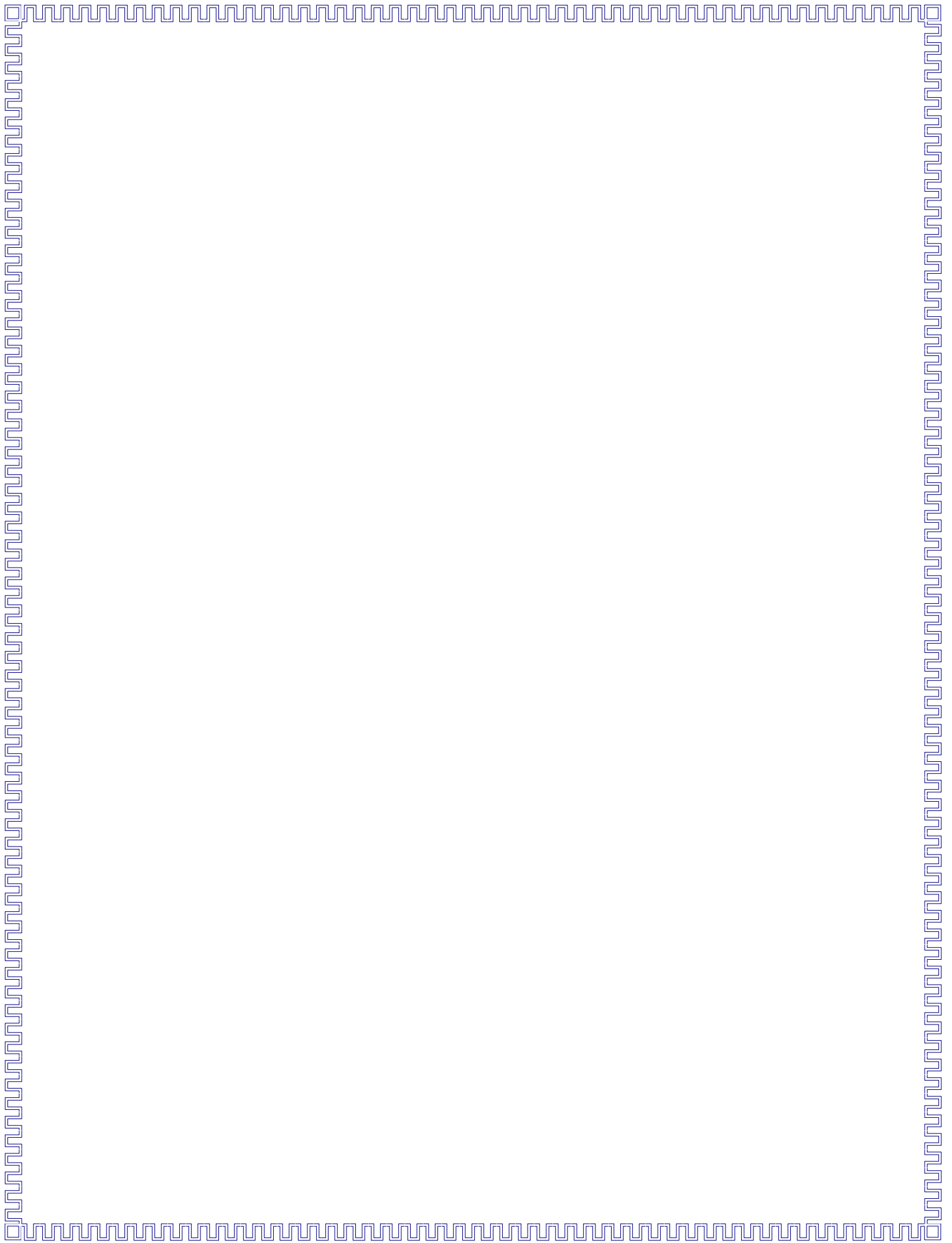


Phase Two:

DECLARE YOURSELF!

Developed by youth for youth

1st Edition
July 2008
PYLN



Transition: Joe's story



From my elementary school through middle school years I never had a problem with my IEP or transition plan. This was because my mom and my dad were very involved. I also had my elementary school principal and my learning support team helping in the effort as well. But during my high school years I became involved with my transition plan and my IEP. Before I was in high school I never knew what a

transition plan and what an IEP was. Then my teachers and counselors told me about my IEP and transition plan and let me become involved. A lot of the students in my 9th and 10th grade classes didn't know what their disability was either, thanks to the programs in the my school, now students know about their disability. After high school I attended Empire Beauty school and applied what I learned in school by getting better grades on tests since I knew how to advocate for my accommodations.

Transition: Collan's story



My name is Collan Baker. I am a 2008 graduate from Youngsville High School. I participated in track, and chorus lettering in both through

out high school. I also received a scholarship from the Choral Music Boosters at my graduation.

I have always found it difficult to advocate for myself. It would have been easier if others could have read my mind. I didn't attend my own IEP meetings until 10th grade. I didn't like hearing others talk about me. In 11th grade I finally realized the importance of letting the IEP team know what I wanted to do after high school.

I had visited Hiram G Andrews when I was in 10th grade, along with job fairs, and college expos. I decided that Hiram G. Andrews was where I wanted to go. It took my whole senior year to complete all the requirements to attend Hiram G. Andrews.

When it comes to making career choices this can be a hard thing for anyone to do. That's why it is important to start your search early in high school. I have worked during the summer for the past 3 years, this has also helped me with decision making about my future. All youth need to be a part of their IEP from the beginning. If you don't understand something ask questions, and you can be an important member of the team. Remember this is about you.

Speak up for yourself

What is advocacy and how to do you advocate for yourself?

Advocacy can be easily defined as an action that produces change.

American's with Disabilities Act- ADA

If you're a person with a disability you can live an independent productive life, but you will find yourself in situations that will try to hinder your independence. Society's stereotypes are among the barriers you will face. However, you can do something about it. You can take a stand and let your voice be heard. You can be an agent of change, either as an individual or as a part of a larger group.

The PYLN believes that one of the most important parts of becoming independent is learning how to advocate for what you want. If you advocate for yourself, you are speaking up for what you want, and not letting other people speak for you. Too many times young people allow other people (usually adults) to make decisions for them. While advice and assistance from adults is a good thing, your future is your decision! This sheet is going to give advice on how to be your own self advocate.

The 4 keys to being a good self advocate

1) Do Research

In order to tell people what you want, you need to know what is out there. What are your options? What do you have to do to get the things you want? It is up to you to do your homework about things like colleges, accommodations, and places you can go to get the things you need (example: Office of Vocational Rehabilitation). You need to know the pros and cons about decisions, and be able to make an educated decision.

2) Communication

Learning how to communicate with people is key to advocating for your needs.

- ✓ Be polite- No yelling, manners go along way, BUT DON'T LET PEOPLE WALK ALL OVER YOU. (Don't forget to smile 😊)
- ✓ Be confident- You need to know what you want to say! (You did research; you know what you're talking about)
- ✓ Be heard- It is your life, make your feelings known, people can't read your mind.

3) Compromise

While the decisions that are being made are about you, it is important to be open minded about other people's advice and ideas. Make sure that you are realistic about your goals (example: if you are not a good athlete, wanting to be in the NBA is probably not a good career goal).

4) Teamwork

You have a great number of people you can count on for good advice. Know who the people are who you can count on. Let the professionals do their jobs, and let your parents be your parents. Let your friends be your friends. They all have an important role in your transition process. Listen to their advice but always understand....ITS ALL ABOUT YOU!

Healthcare advocacy

Did you know that transition affects more than your education? Almost all parts of your life will transition in some way. Healthcare transition is a very important step for all youth to become independent. Often this transition includes finding new doctors, possibly changing hospitals, services you receive, and getting different insurance coverage. When you turn 18, you are considered an adult by the medical community. This means that you are in charge of your medical decisions. Your doctors will be asking you about your medical needs, your history, and should ask what procedures you may or may not want. However, your family or guardians can still be involved in the decisions. You need to be prepared to handle these changes and begin to understand your care as an adult.

Self advocacy DO's and DON'T's

Advocacy is not always easy; in fact, it rarely is. Advocacy takes time, knowledge, and dedication. Often when we have to advocate we may be in positions where we are upset, angry, and "caught in the heat of the moment." Although these moments may seem right to advocate, it is often better to wait and become more informed before advocating. Below is a list of things that should and should not be done when advocating. Advocacy is a skill that takes practice, the more you practice advocacy the better you will get.

DO's	DON'T's
Be polite	Yell or demand
Ask questions	Be shy
Know your information	Come to a meeting unprepared
Keep a record of important papers, phone numbers and names: Be organized	Lose your records, phone numbers, names of people who helped and hindered you
Send thank you notes and show your appreciation	Be ungrateful for people's time and effort
Give your contact information, and also remember to get theirs too!	Don't network
Be Confident	Be a push over or arrogant (overconfident)

How to find supports

There are some important things to remember when trying to locate supportive people to aid you throughout your transition process. The first thing to remember is that almost anyone can be a source of support; parents, teachers, friends, rehabilitation counselors, church leaders, etc. The second important thing to remember is that a supportive person needs to be someone who believes in you and your abilities. Likewise he or she is someone who can help you generate new ideas about transition-related goals.

It is important to first consider the supports you may already have in your life. These could be friends, family, teachers, and many other people who believe in your abilities and want to see you do well. Talk to them about what you have learned so far about your disability and transition process. Once they understand your disability and transition plans, they will be able to become fellow advocates, and will be a source of ideas for future transition related goals.

If for any reason you do not already have some sort of support system in place, there are a lot of places where you can look for supportive people. Perhaps you have a parent or guardian who can help you discover your abilities and aide in the transition process. You may have a teacher or counselor who might have some new ideas about realistic goals and how you can accomplish them. Speak regularly with your rehabilitation counselor or supports coordinator, if you have one, and use him or her as a source of help and information. Chances are he or she will be impressed by your willingness to learn. If you don't have a vocational rehabilitation counselor, contact your regional Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and they can give you an application for services. Contact other agencies for people with disabilities, and tell them that you want to make sure that you have access to all of the support services that you need.

Finding supports may be as easy as talking to your parent or guardian, or it may require a little more thought and work. No matter what your situation, however, there are always people out there who will believe in you and help you through the transition process. Sometimes it's just a matter of knowing where to look.

Help in school: The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and the Secondary Transition Process

Many youth hear about their IEP's and their transition plans, but few students actually know what their school is talking about. This section will help you to:

- understand the federal law that protects your rights
- discuss the parts of an IEP and why it is important for you to participate
- use the transition process to plan for your future

What is IDEA?

IDEA stands for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This is a national law which determines the accommodations and supports provided to students with disabilities from ages 3 to 21. IDEA works to ensure that all students have a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), which means all students should be taught in a public school for free while getting an education that is right for the person. This education should help the student goals of further education, employment, and/or independent living. IDEA requires that students with disabilities have an IEP, or an Individualized Education Program.

What is an IEP?

When you have a disability, you have certain legal rights to help you succeed. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is one of those rights. An IEP is a form that summarizes what you do well, the needs you have, how your disability affects your learning, what skills you need to work on in school this year, what services your school will provide, and where your learning will take place. It also lists the accommodations you receive and what your goals are for high school and after high school. It is created by a team of people who include your teachers, your family, and most importantly, you! You are also allowed to invite whoever else you feel needs to be a part of your "team" (such as friends, a pastor, or a counselor.) Since your IEP is all about you, you have a unique opportunity to be in control of your life and your experiences in high school. Having

input and actively participating in your IEP can help you be successful long after you graduate.

Your school and teachers are responsible for making sure that the goals, accommodations, and supports that are written in your IEP are working for you. Each year, your IEP must be reviewed. This is done at what is called an IEP meeting. Your IEP is reviewed once a year, and updated as needed.

What is transition planning in the IEP?

Transition planning must be included in your IEP beginning at age 14. Transition planning helps you figure out what you are going to do after you graduate from high school. Transition is an organized set of activities that helps you move from high school to college, post-secondary training, independent living or work. It focuses on what you need and what you want to do.

Once you graduate from high school, the assistance and services you receive from your teachers such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, wrap around services and the people who help you with math, reading, behavior, test taking, etc. will no longer be there to help you. But as you know life does not end after you leave high school. Therefore, you need to have a plan to be able to achieve your goals and live life as an adult. The transition process was created to help you set your goals and get the things you need to achieve your dreams.

Your school is required to help you develop post-school goals for when you leave school. Your post-school goals are found in your IEP.

The three “post-school goals” that you need to think about when planning your future are:

1. Post secondary education or training (going to a 2-4 university, community college, technical school, or anything that furthers your education)
2. Employment (getting a job)

3. Independent Living (how to live on your own successfully - where do you want to live, how will you get around in your community, what do you want to do in your free time)

How do I set post-school goals?

To be able to set post-school goals, you need to know about yourself including your interests, strengths and weaknesses. Assessment is a process where you learn about yourself and your post school goals. Even though assessment may involve taking some tests, it can also involve things like learning about jobs through real life experiences. When you are asked to take a test, it's important for you to learn about why it is happening, what to expect and how you can get accommodations to take the test. After take the test it is important to sit with someone you trust to talk about what happened, how you are feeling and review your results. This information can be used to help you develop your post school goals.

Your post school goals directly influence the classes and activities you will take during high school. Transition planning helps the IEP team know about what you are interested in doing and includes agencies that may help you transition out of high school more easily.

What can be scary about your IEP?

Going to your first IEP meeting can be overwhelming. You will probably see:

1. A bunch of people wearing shirts and ties.
2. A couple people you do not even know
3. Your principal and your parents in the same room
4. That it can be hard to speak your mind.
5. That teachers use their own language

Even though an IEP meeting can be scary it is your chance to have a say in the classes, activities, and supports you have in high school.

How You Can Participate in your IEP?

1. Do Research- Ask to know what your IEP says before the meeting. You should try to truly understand what it says
2. Write it Down- Think about what you want to say and write it down so you don't lose track of your thoughts
3. Communicate- Your IEP is about you! Know your strengths and weaknesses and tell people what you could use to help to do better. Tell your IEP team what you see for your future (if you don't know that's ok).
4. Be a part of the team- Get to know the people that are on your IEP team, know what they can do for you. Letting the adults know what you want is important, but also keep in mind that adults might have some good ideas and suggestions-they are "professionals." Remember, be polite but be willing to fight for what you need.

Getting Involved in My IEP



Activity

Worksheet: Guide of questions to help you take charge of your IEP and transition plan

Questions to ask your teacher about your IEP

- 1) What is my IEP?
- 2) What are my IEP goals?
- 3) How does my IEP effect my education?
- 4) How does my IEP prepare me to live independently?
- 5) What is your role in my IEP?
- 6) What is my role in my IEP?
- 7) What is my parent/guardian's role?
- 8) Who else is part of my IEP team?

Questions to ask your teacher about your transition plan

Transition Planning Worksheet:

What are my goals for after high school?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

What am I doing in school that is helping me achieve my goals?

What supports and services are out there to help me with the following?

a. Going to College , Business, Technical or Trade school

- i.
- ii.
- iii.

b. Getting a job (Employment)

- i.
- ii.
- iii.

c. Living on my own

- i.
- ii.
- iii.

- 2) What does my local Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) do and how can they help me? What is their address, phone number and website address?
- 3) What does my local MH/MR office do and how can they help me? What is their address, phone number and website address?
- 4) What is a Center for Independent Living and how can they help me? What is their name, address, phone number and website address?

Activity

How to Participate in MY IEP

Because the IEP is about YOU, *you* need to be the one in charge during the IEP meetings. Everyone will be talking about *your* education and life, so it is important for you to express *your* opinions. If you feel that something needs to be created or changed in *your* IEP, there are steps you can take to do so.

Getting ready for the IEP meeting

Before your IEP meeting get prepared.

Review your IEP from last year and make notes on the changes or additions you would like to see. Also highlight things you don't understand. Talk to a trusted adult about what you would like to see in this year's IEP

Before the meeting do your homework so that you are able to:

Before you enter your next IEP meeting, be prepared to answer the following questions:

- 1) discuss your post-school goals
- 2) describe your disability
- 3) talk about your strengths and needs
- 4) describe your learning style (how you learn best and what gets in the way of your learning)
- 5) tell team members the accommodations you need and why you need them
- 6) describe any medications you are taking or medical needs you have

At the IEP meeting

1. Don't just sit there:

By the time you are in high school, you should consider running your own IEP meeting. If you don't know how to run a meeting, ask a family member, favorite teacher, or a trusted adult for help. Before the IEP meeting you can get together a small group of people (family members, friends, or other trusted adult) to help practice what you want to say. At first you may feel uncomfortable talking at your IEP meeting. If it helps write down what you want to say and have someone you trust read it. Or you could, put together a PowerPoint, or short video of what you would like to have discussed at your IEP.

2. Review IEP pages one and two

Make sure your age and the correct date you expect to graduate are both listed. You will also be required to sign the IEP form to prove that you were at the meeting.

3. Discuss and Identify Your Post School Goals (IEP Section 3)

4. Talk about how you are doing in school (present levels of academic achievement and functional performance)

At this part of the IEP meeting you and the other team members will talk about how you are doing in school in connection to what you want to do after you graduate.

5. Talk about the classes and activities you will be taking this school year.

Go back to section 3 the Transition Chart Section of the IEP. In this chart the classes that you will be taking this year are listed along with the activities or services you will receive that will help you reach your post school goals. Included in this section is information on where and when the activity will take place and who will help you.

For each of your post school goals you will need to be working on at least one annual goal. In the chart at least one activity or service should have "yes" checked that there is annual goal in your IEP.

6. Annual Goals

Things to think about when discussing and reviewing your goals:

- What skills do you need to work on to reach your post school goals?
- Are there any health issues that interfere with learning or being in class all day?
- Do you have any behavioral issues that you need to work on?
- Are the annual goals in your IEP are based on your post school goals?
- Are your IEP goals should be written so that you understand what you need to work on this year?
- Did you agree to work on this year goals for this year?
- Are you able to understand how your progress will be measured throughout the year and how you will know that the goal has been reached?

7. Complete the other sections of the IEP

Based on your transition post school goals you and the other team members will discuss any accommodations, supports or related services that you will need to be successful during this school year.

- ***Modifications and Specially Designed Instruction (accommodations)*** are the changes to the class work or things that help you succeed in your classes and other activities.
- It is important to know what accommodations you are getting now so that you can ask for them and succeed in the future. As an adult you are expected to know what you need and what your accommodations are.

Some examples of Specially Designed Instruction are:

1. Extended time to finish tests
2. Wheelchair Ramps
3. Braille Menu at a restaurant

4. Assistance in reading a book or a test
5. Books on tape

- **RELATED SERVICES:** Are the extra services that you need in order to be successful in your education program.

Some examples of Related Services are:

Physical Therapy (PT)
Occupational Therapy (OT)
Speech Language Therapy

When is your next IEP meeting?

Write the date below, and be prepared to participate!

Activity

How to Make Sure My IEP is Going as Planned

Throughout the year, i.e. at the end of each grading period, you should ask yourself the following questions to make sure you are making progress on your goals and that you are getting the right supports:

Are you getting the accommodations and related services discussed at your IEP meeting? If not, what are you not getting?

If you are not getting the accommodations and related services discussed at your IEP meeting who can you talk to about getting them?

What are your IEP goals?

Who can you talk to if you are not where you would like to be with your annual goal(s) progress?

What successes are you having in reaching your post school goals?

What challenges are you encountering in reaching your post school goals?

Have you contacted any agencies or talked to any who can help you with your post school goals?

Are you learning better and growing?

Checklist For Preparing for Successful Post-School Outcomes:

Middle School

Special thanks to: The Office for Disability Services, Penn State University, 814-863-1807, Web site: www.equity.psu.edu/ods/ (modified to be youth-friendly, with permission)

Middle School:

Students should:

- Identify personal learning styles and the necessary accommodations to be a successful learner and worker. (for example, do you learn something best by reading it, hearing it, or doing it?)
- Develop an understanding of your disability.
- Make sure that you have good class attendance.
- Begin to think about your career options.
- Begin speaking to your guidance counselor about what high school classes will best prepare you to meet your goals.
- Ask your guidance counselor what career assessments may be most appropriate for you to take.
- Eat healthy and exercise daily.
- Participate and volunteer in school, extracurricular, and community activities.
- Develop a portfolio you will use throughout your high school education. To start, use the worksheets you completed from this Toolkit. It will help you plan for your future. It can be shared with your family, teachers, OVR counselor and other agencies that can support you. Some information can be used to show your talents and abilities with employers.

Checklist for Preparing for successful post school outcomes: NINTH GRADE

Ninth Grade:

Students should:

- Attend and be involved in IEP meetings with parents, teachers and special education personnel.
- Develop a clear understanding of your disability and how it affects your life.
- Broaden experiences through community activities and expand friendships.
- Find out if you are eligible to get financial supports such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, and state waiver programs.
- Ask the school about career assessments and exploration programs at the high school (e.g., Does the school provide career counseling or testing?).
- Meet with guidance counselors about courses required for employment, vocational training, and college or postsecondary school (i.e., Foreign Language, Math, English, Science, etc).
- Be able to describe your disability and advocate for supports and accommodations.
- Have an identification card and be able to communicate personal information.
- Discuss plans/goals with parents about what you will do after you graduate.
- Start thinking about where you would like to live and the supports needed to live there.
- Meet with guidance counselors about future plans. Obtain information about employment, vocational training, and colleges or postsecondary schools.

- Search Web sites for employment, vocational training, colleges and postsecondary schools to learn more about course requirements, potential majors, costs, services for students with disabilities, living arrangements, activities, student life etc.
- Look into driver's education when the time is right. And pursue and use local transportation systems outside of your family.
- Explore assistive technology (such as wheelchairs, reachers, and TTY, etc.) to be more involved in your community and to reach your goals.
- Consider volunteer opportunities in your community to better yourself and your opportunities for careers.
- Start practicing skills in decision making, time management, and organization skills.
- Understand your health care needs and be able to communicate this to you medical team.
- Participate in extracurricular activities.
- If you are considering vocational training, participate in an open house at a Career and Technical Education Center.
- Become informed about sexuality and family planning.
- Continue to build your portfolio you will use throughout your high school education. To start, use the worksheets you completed from this Toolkit. It will help you plan for your future. It can be shared with your family, teachers, OVR counselor and other agencies that can support you. Some information can be used to show your talents and abilities with employers.

Checklist for Preparing for successful post school outcomes: TENTH GRADE

Tenth Grade:

Students Should:

- Broaden experiences through community activities and expand friendships.
- Continue attending IEP meetings and become more involved in the decisions made.
- Find out if you are eligible to get financial supports such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, and state waiver programs.
- Search the Internet and other resources (i.e., books, articles) to learn more about your disability.
- Identify how your disability impacts you in the classroom, at work, and in social settings. You should be able to discuss your disability and its affect on your education.
- Learn more about the differences between accommodations adjustments in college, employment, or independent living versus high school.
- If you are considering college, think about taking the PSAT, which is a practice test for the SAT, which many colleges require for entrance. Explore possible accommodations for the test. Go to the College Board Web site for more information: <http://www.collegeboard.com/testing/>.
- Begin to use accommodations that are more in line with what is used in college or training and employment after high school. Individualized instruction and certain modifications used in high school will not be provided after high school.
- Participate in a career assessment and make appropriate career choices. These choices should match your individual strengths and goals for postsecondary education.
- Research the requirements needed to achieve your goals in postsecondary employment, education, or independent living.

- Participate in volunteer and paid work experiences.
- Meet with your guidance counselor to determine if the courses you are taking can help you reach your goals in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living.
- Visit and tour colleges and postsecondary school campuses.
- Become involved in activities beyond the classroom (i.e., clubs, sports, student government, community service, volunteer organizations, etc). Postsecondary schools look for these activities in addition to grades and test scores when determining admissions.
- Discuss options and choices for employment, postsecondary living, and independent living with parents.
- Practice and learn independent living skills such as budgeting, cooking, shopping, and housekeeping.
- Identify adult health care providers.
- Know how your interests can help you learn about jobs you might like to do.
- Take part in job shadowing experiences.
- Talk to your family, friends, and people in the community about employment opportunities.
- Investigate support services available through vocational rehabilitation, public welfare, local transportation systems.
- Identify needed personal care attendant (PCA's) services, and if appropriate, learn to direct and manage these services.
- Practice job interviewing skills.
- Know what accommodations you need to work and be able to explain them to someone you trust, so you're ready to talk to an employer.

- Find out if your school or OVR counselor has employers that would help you practice interviews.
- Go to job fairs to learn about jobs.
- Use tools and resources on the internet to learn about jobs, like what training is needed, salaries and whether the jobs are in your community.
- Apply for jobs.
- Participate in a community-based work assessment and learn your strengths and weaknesses are, and the supports you need.
- Ask your teacher if you can explore work through unpaid work experiences as part of your transition plan.
- Use the assessment worksheets in this toolkit to help you explore and prepare for a job.
- Be honest with yourself about what you're good at and work on this things you could improve.
- Continue to build your portfolio you will use throughout your high school education. To start, use the worksheets you completed from this Toolkit. It will help you plan for your future. It can be shared with your family, teachers, OVR counselor and other agencies that can support you. Some information can be used to show your talents and abilities with employers.

Checklist for Preparing for successful post school outcomes: ELEVENTH GRADE

Eleventh Grade:

Students Should:

- Continue attending IEP meetings and become more involved in the decisions made. Invite individuals from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and other service agencies.
- Broaden experiences through community activities and expand friendships.
- Participate in volunteer and paid work experiences.
- Continue to develop self- advocacy skills (asking for help, communicating needs to others, etc.)
- If you are having trouble locating a specific school or program on your own, make an appointment with your guidance counselor.
- Learn how to ask for job accommodations

Postsecondary Education

- Attend college fairs.
- Research college disabilities services web sites or call the office to learn about eligibility for services, documentation guidelines, and services offered. Also, pay particular attention to admissions criteria, admissions deadlines, financial aid information, scholarship information, programs, cost, housing and food services.
- Contact the disability services office for a face-to-face meeting. Learn more about the academic accommodations and supports that are offered and for which you qualify.

- Meet with a representative from the admissions office to find out admissions criteria. What will be needed in addition to filling out an application?
- Be aware that accommodations and supports in postsecondary education may be different than they are in high school. Begin to think more independently and practice stronger self advocacy. For example, if you are using an aid, begin to think about how you would work more independently.
- Continue to research college web sites. Research application procedures, course requirements, and entrance requirements for colleges of interests.
- Identify tests required for admission at the college or colleges chosen: (e.g., SAT I, ACT Assessment, or SAT II Subject Tests).
- Register and take the SAT and the ACT, if not taken in the tenth grade. Explore possible accommodations for the test, and apply for them. For information regarding SAT testing for students with disabilities, go to the following web site: <http://www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/index.html>. Discuss the results with guidance counselor and parents.
- Contact the Office for Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) for information about services for high school and college at <http://www.dli.state.pa.us>, click on disability services, click on OVR.
- Complete an assistive technology assessment for college, if you plan to use assistive technology in college.
- Obtain documentation of disability from current assessments (within two years of graduation date) because colleges require assessments.
- The summer prior to senior year, visit the disability office, learning centers, computer labs and assistive technology labs at postsecondary schools and colleges of interest.

- Ask your teacher or OVR counselor if there are any pre-college experience programs that you could attend over the summer, or take a college course for the experience.

Employment

- Know how your interests can help you learn about jobs you might like to do.
- Take part in job shadowing experiences.
- Talk to your family, friends, and people in the community about employment opportunities.
- Investigate support services available through vocational rehabilitation, public welfare, and local transportation systems.
- Identify needed personal care attendant (PCA's) services, and if appropriate, learn to direct and manage these services.
- Practice job interviewing skills.
- Know what accommodations you need to work and be able to explain them to someone you trust, so you're ready to talk to an employer.
- Find out if your school or OVR counselor has employers that would help you practice interviews.
- Attend job fairs to find out about jobs.
- Use tools and resources on the internet to learn about jobs, like what training is needed, salaries and whether the jobs are in your community.
- Apply for jobs.
- Participate in a community-based work assessment and learn your strengths and weaknesses are, and the supports you need.
- Ask your teacher if you can explore work through unpaid work experiences as part of your transition plan or an internship.

- Use the assessment worksheets in this toolkit to help you explore and prepare for a job.
- Be honest with yourself about what you're good at and work on the things you could improve.
- Continue to build your portfolio you will use throughout your high school education. To start, use the worksheets you completed from this Toolkit. It will help you plan for your future. It can be shared with your family, teachers, OVR counselor and other agencies that can support you. Some information can be used to show your talents and abilities with employers.

Independent Living

- Independent living is about more than just where you live, it is about choosing how, where, and with whom you live.
- Begin making connections to agencies that could help you, like centers for independent living and housing authorities.
- Find out if you are eligible to get financial supports such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, and state waiver programs.
- Eat healthy and exercise daily.
- Practice and learn independent living skills such as budgeting, cooking, shopping, and housekeeping.
- Start thinking about how you are going to pay for living on your own. If living on a fixed income, think about getting on a waiting list for low income housing.

Checklist for Preparing for successful post school outcomes: TWELFTH GRADE

Twelfth Grade:

Students Should:

- Continue attending IEP meetings and become more involved in the decisions made. Invite individuals from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and other service agencies.
- Broaden experiences through community activities and expand friendships.
- Practice effective communication by developing interview skills, asking for help, and identifying necessary accommodations at post secondary and work environments.
- Prepare transition packet for disability documentation that includes: evaluation reports, transcripts, test scores, current IEP, medical records, writing samples, and letters of recommendation.
- Participate in volunteer and paid work experiences.
- Become involved with advocacy and support groups.
- Take responsibility for arriving on time to classes, work, appointments, and social activities.
- Assume responsibility for health care needs, such as making appointments, and filling and taking prescriptions.
- Register to vote at age 18 (and register for selective service.)
- Identify adult support provided by community based agencies.
- Obtain letters of recommendation for employment and education (remember to get letters from teachers before graduation.)

Postsecondary Education

- Begin completing postsecondary school and college applications. Applying early may increase the chance of getting into school or college of choice.
- Learn about advocating and talking to your instructors about academic accommodations.
- Research the disability services office Web site to review documentation guidelines and obtain what is needed.
- After you have been accepted into a college, contact disability service offices at colleges to schedule and participate in an intake appointment.
- At the intake meeting for disability services, provide the correct documentation about your disability and services to the office. Discuss requested academic adjustments to determine if your request is reasonable (academic adjustments received in high school are not always appropriate for college).
- Submit documentation to the disability services office at the postsecondary schools or colleges that you have chosen.
- Meet with a professor, academic advisor, or representative of the college major you intend to pursue.
- Meet with financial aid office to discuss and apply for scholarships, grants and aid.
- Schedule an appointment with the Office for Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) <http://www.dli.state.pa.us/landi/cwp/view.asp?a=128&q=61197> to discuss assistance available.
- Request and schedule an assistive technology assessment through OVR, if applicable.
- Talk with students who are receiving services at the college and other postsecondary education training settings about their experience.

Employment

- Know how your interests can help you learn about jobs you might like to do.
- Take part in job shadowing experiences.
- Talk to your family, friends, and people in the community about employment opportunities.
- Investigate support services available through vocational rehabilitation, public welfare, local transportation systems.
- Identify needed personal care attendant (PCA's) services, and if appropriate, learn to direct and manage these services.
- Practice job interviewing skills.
- Know what accommodations you need to work and be able to explain them to someone you trust, so you're ready to talk to an employer.
- Find out if your school or OVR counselor has employers that would help you practice interviews.
- Develop a career portfolio to show your talents and skills.
- Use tools and resources on the internet to learn about jobs, like what training is needed, salaries and whether the jobs are in your community.
- Apply for jobs.
- Participate in a community-based work assessment and learn your strengths and weaknesses are, and the supports you need.
- Ask your teacher if you can explore work through work experiences or internships as part of your transition plan.
- Use the assessment worksheets in this toolkit to help you explore and prepare for a job.
- Be honest with yourself about what you're good at and work on ways you could improve.

- Ask your teacher or OVR counselor if you can participate in an internship.
- Continue to build your portfolio you will use throughout your high school education. To start, use the worksheets you completed from this Toolkit. It will help you plan for your future. It can be shared with your family, teachers, OVR counselor and other agencies that can support you. Some information can be used to show your talents and abilities with employers.

Independent Living

- Make detailed plans for independent living. Continue development of independent living skills.
- Find out if you are eligible to get financial supports such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, and state waiver programs.
- Eat healthy and attempt to exercise daily.
- Practice and learn independent living skills such as budgeting, cooking, shopping, and housekeeping.
- Begin to think about what kind of insurance you will receive after high school.
- Independent Living is about more than just where you live, it is about choosing how, where, and with whom you live.

Think about the following questions:

- Do you want a house or an apartment?
- Will you have roommates or pets?
- Do you have any accessibility or transportation needs?
- Develop a list of questions you want to ask each landlord

In Summary

Phase Two: Declare Yourself!

Reality check

Terms to know

- 1) Transition - An organized set of activities that helps you move from high school to college, post-secondary training, independent living, or work successfully.
Transition focuses on what you need and what you want to do with your future
- 2) Self advocate - A person who speaks up for themselves and what they want!
- 3) Post school goal - Things that students decide to do with their life after they leave school
- 4) Individualized Education Plan (IEP) - A form that outlines your abilities, skills you need to work on in school, and your accommodations and helps you plan for your future goals.
- 5) Americans' With Disabilities Act (ADA) - Law passed in 1990 by Congress to ensure that people with disabilities would have equal access and equal rights

The three post school outcomes

1. Post secondary education or training (going to a 2-4 university, community college, technical school, or anything that furthers your education)
2. Employment (getting a job)
3. Independent Living (how to live on your own successfully - where do you want to live, how will you get around in your community, what do you want to do in your free time)

Keys to being a good self advocate:

- 1) Do research - Know your options!
- 2) Communication - Talk to people! Be assertive, but polite!
- 3) Compromise - Let your teachers and parents lend a helping hand they know their stuff.
- 4) Teamwork - Know who you can ask to be a part of your IEP team.

DO's and DON'Ts of being a self advocate

DO's	DON'Ts
Be polite	Yell or Demand
Ask questions	Be Shy
Know your information	Come to a meeting unprepared
Keep a record of important papers, phone numbers, names: Be organized	Lose your records, phone numbers, names of people who helped and hindered you
Send Thank You notes and show your appreciation	Be ungrateful for people's time and effort
Give your contact information, and also remember to get theirs too!	Don't network
Be Confident	Be a push over or arrogant (overconfident)

Review questions

1. What is transition and what are the three transition goal areas?
2. What is advocacy?
3. What are the four keys to being a good self advocate?
4. What are the DO's and DON'Ts of advocacy?
5. What questions should you ask your teacher and others about your IEP and transition plan?
6. How do you find supports you need?



Phase Three:
EMPOWER YOURSELF!

Developed by youth for youth

**1st Edition
July 2008
PYLN**

Learning empowerment the tough way: Everett's story



I only really started paying attention to this transition stuff my freshman year of college. Up until that point I

knew I had an IEP while I was in high school and that people had meetings about me. My mom took care of all the "adult" things, and she was darn good at it. So, I felt like I had no reason to worry about my education and supports since adults took care of these for me.

I had one dream growing up, that was to play wheelchair basketball at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. When people would ask me what I was going to do when I grew up I didn't say I wanted to be a teacher or a sportswriter. I said I wanted to play wheelchair basketball at Edinboro University. School was not a priority, my entire life revolved around my friends and getting better at basketball.

My hard work in basketball did pay off; I was recruited for the wheelchair basketball team at Edinboro University the summer of my junior year of high school and was accepted into the

university. I could not believe I was going to get my chance to play basketball in college! That is all I cared about; I thought school work would take care of itself like it always did.

As one can imagine I was very excited about move-in day. I did not think anything could ever go wrong. However, I can remember my first night in my dorm room, I laid down to go to sleep and something in my heart just did not feel right. I can remember thinking..."Why do I feel so empty inside, this is not how I am supposed to be feeling right now." Months went by and I was still feeling down. I just thought I was homesick, and that I would soon get over it.

When winter came we got a lot of snow, and getting around campus in a wheelchair was not exactly easy for me. I didn't go many places and I quickly got very depressed about my life, and about being at Edinboro. My first semester I had 1.8 GPA and did not attend many classes regularly and didn't hang out with many people, and 2nd semester started exactly the same way. Until one of my

friends on the basketball team said: "What's wrong with you?" You are not the same Ev I knew before you got here." A red flag went off in my head, I didn't even mention to anyone that I was feeling depressed. It was obvious to people who knew me. The next day I went to any University employee that I thought could help me, and told them that I was depressed and needed to transfer to another school.

Now came the hard part: telling my parents that I wanted to transfer to another school. I called my mom and told her how I was feeling. For lack of a better word she freaked out. She asked: "Why would you want to do something crazy like that? This was your dream." I told her that basketball was no longer my dream. Having a family was now my dream, and that I knew that staying at Edinboro was not going to help me achieve my dreams. My mom told me she felt I was making the wrong decision but what if I really wanted to leave I had to figure out what the next step was on my own.

This is when I realized I had no clue what steps to take to transfer to another school. I had no idea how my

financial aid worked. I had to talk to my OVR counselor about maintaining my services. I never did any of the talking on my own. It was scary. I got a crash course in transition.

I came home for the summer and planned to attend a community college for a year. However, I did not have a car or a job. I had to call the bus company and employers on my own. I didn't realize how hard it was for people in wheelchairs to get accessible transportation if they did not live in the city.

My parents made a conscious effort to make me do everything on my own. It was hard for them to watch me struggle. I think that it helped me learn what being an adult really means, and that you can't expect your parents to take care of things that are about you and your future. I can say very proudly that I will soon be graduating from college with the hopes of becoming a high school teacher. I hope my story can teach you a few things

Empowerment leading to college: Rachel's story



Every kid at some point thinks about life after high school. Either they are going to go onto college, go right to work, or attempt to reach their independent living goals. I knew from a very young age that college was going to be my choice.

My dream has always been to become a teacher. One of the first steps of getting into college is to take the SAT's, a test that takes about half of the day. I have a learning disability (LD for short) and the SAT would have taken me the whole day to finish if I didn't have accommodations.

Knowing myself and how my disability effects me on tests, I knew I had to tell my guidance counselor to make sure I had all the accommodations I typically used while taking a test. When I take tests, I am allowed to have extended time and a person who reads the test to me.

I went to my guidance counselor thinking that getting my accommodations for the SAT would be simple. I came to find out that I was wrong. We had to fill out paper work and wait for College

Board to approve my accommodations. There was just one problem, my counselor would not sign the papers I needed to send to College Board, because she thought I didn't use the accommodations I was requesting often enough on tests. She was extremely wrong. I used my accommodations all the time

Needless to say I was a little irritated. Simply because all my teachers knew I used my accommodations, and the one person who is supposed to be helping me get in to college didn't know anything about me and how much getting accepted into school meant to me. I left school that day determined to find my own solution to this little problem.

I went home and told my mom, we needed to schedule a meeting with my guidance counselor. My mom being the advocate on my behalf called the school right away and asked for an appointment. Minutes later my telephone rang. It was my counselor telling us that she felt we did not need to have a meeting. At first mom and I agreed the meeting was not necessary. Then when we were in the car after the call to cancel the meeting, we began talking about the whole SAT mess.

Days after my mom called the school my guidance counselor walked into the library and saw me taking a test using my accommodations...isn't it ironic, don't you think? Soon after she saw me in the library, I got the papers saying that I was granted my accommodation request.

I was able to take my SAT on a level playing field because I was able to take charge and tell people exactly what I need to succeed. It makes me feel good to know that I have learned how to advocate for myself and not back down!

NEVER BACK DOWN!

What is empowerment?

Empowerment is a process which helps people gain power and control of their life. People who are empowered have the knowledge and ability to lead.

Empowerment includes:

- ✓ Having decision-making knowledge and power
- ✓ Having access to information and resources
- ✓ Having a range of options from which you can make choices
- ✓ Positive outlook on being able to make change
- ✓ Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stereotypes or discrimination

Why is empowerment important?

- ✓ To be able to make decisions about your life
- ✓ To show others that you have control of your own life
- ✓ To take responsibility for your own actions
- ✓ To be true to yourself

Help is out there

Drawing the Line

There is a fine line between support and control. Because people with disabilities often need more support to do things than other people, it may be difficult for people to figure out the difference between support and control.

Support- providing assistance which is directed and guided by a person with a disability to do the things that he or she has decided they want to do.

Control- providing assistance to a person with a disability which is not directed or guided by that person or when decisions are made for that person and not directed by him or her.

Youth with disabilities must have the right to direct their care and make decisions about their life.

How do you know when someone is controlling you?

- ✓ They don't ask you what you want
- ✓ They speak for you
- ✓ They do things without asking you if it is ok with you.

So what do you do when someone has crossed the line from support to control?

- ✓ Find out if they realize that they are controlling you.
- ✓ Ask them why they are controlling you
- ✓ Explain to them that you have ideas too and that you would like them to respect your ideas
- ✓ If they do not change their behavior you may want to ask another person to intervene (assist in helping you get rid of the problem)

Tips for getting services

As a person with a disability, you will be eligible for assistance from a service provider. With this sheet the PYLN hopes to give you tips to help contact the services that can help you best. We will also give helpful questions to ask any service provider you may come in contact with along the way. When you turn 18, agencies expect you to speak for yourself, not your parents. For example, if you request accommodations in college or training after high school, it is up to you to talk to the college since they will not talk with your parents.

Things you should know for filling out an application for employment or services

- ✓ Your full name (middle name included)
- ✓ Social Security number (Try to memorize)
- ✓ Your official disability diagnosis and when it happened
- ✓ What accommodations you need and/or are asking for
- ✓ Medical history (blood type, surgeries, illnesses, shots, and medication allergies, and other allergies)
- ✓ Employment history (where and when you worked)
- ✓ Education history (How much school you have finished so far)
- ✓ What is you or your family's household income
- ✓ Your parents' names (also names before they got married)
- ✓ Addresses (past and present)
- ✓ County or township you live in
- ✓ Phone numbers (past and present)
- ✓ Have an emergency contact and phone number
- ✓ References (people who know you well-NOT YOUR PARENTS)

The things you will need

A copy of your:

- ✓ Valid Photo ID (Driver's License or state identification card or Visa)
- ✓ Social Security Card
- ✓ Birth Certificate
- ✓ Insurance Cards (if necessary)
- ✓ Recent Pay stubs (if necessary)
- ✓ At least 2 letters of recommendation

Questions you can ask an agency or service provider

1. What kind of services does your agency provide?
2. Where does your funding come from? (In other words: where do they get their money)
3. How does your agency help youth who are transitioning?
4. What can I expect in your application process and how long will it take?
5. Who can I contact if I don't get the services we agreed upon?

Becoming empowered

How to get empowered

Earlier, you read about the definition of empowerment. Now, let's look at some of the ways that you can become more empowered. Supportive people in your life can be a big help. As we mentioned earlier, these can include people like family members, friends, teachers, or counselors. But it's also important to realize that there are agencies out there which can help you to become more empowered as well. The agencies which might help you will depend a lot on which outcome areas you choose after high school.

Some of these agencies may include:

- ✓ Statewide Independent Living Councils
 - Contact them at www.pasilc.org or call them at 717-364-1732
- ✓ Centers for Independent Living
 - Find your local CIL at www.pasilc.org
- ✓ Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network
 - Email them at: pyln.gb@gmail.com
- ✓ National Youth Leadership Network
 - Contact them at: www.nyln.org

If one of your post school outcomes is independent living, then a center for independent living, or CIL, might be what you need to become empowered. CILs are located in different parts of the state, and their purpose is to teach people with many different kinds of disabilities the skills that are needed to live independently. Once you learn the skills you need, your confidence in your ability to reach your goals will increase.

If your outcome goals include further education or training, it's very important to arrange a meeting with someone at the office for students with disabilities at your college or training center. This office will be called by different names at different places, but its purpose is to make sure that students with disabilities receive the accommodations they need in order to do their school work. It's important to find a school or training center whose staff at the office for students with disabilities is

willing to work with you in order to make sure that you receive all of your accommodations.

If your goals include employment, then you should get involved with your local Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, or OVR. The purpose of this agency is to help people with disabilities find jobs. They may help you to get financial aid for school or pay for you to receive independent living training if they feel that this will help you find a job more easily. They also may provide job coaches, and can help you to find out what job is right for you if you are not sure.

If you qualify, you may want to get support from your local mental health or mental retardation agency. They may be able to help you achieve your goals of independent living and employment.

This is just a brief look at some of the agencies which can help you to feel empowered. It's important to remember that it's up to you to contact these agencies, and to have an idea of what your goals might be.



Worksheet: what can these youth do to empower themselves?

Scenario 1: Tommy

Tommy, 17, is a senior in high school and will be graduating soon. He wants to move into an apartment after high school and attend a trade school. He was born with muscular dystrophy and uses a power wheelchair. His parents think he'll never be able to do anything because of his disability, despite him being an A student. They tell him he can't ever live a normal life and when he turns eighteen, they're placing him in a nursing home.

What can Tommy do?

Tommy's parents are a harsh example but even well meaning family members can be barriers to your independence due to stereotypes. It might be difficult but Tommy must be proactive and go to a school counselor and get connected with the agencies that can assist him with his goals. Such as an office of vocational rehabilitation who can assist him with school and employment. Tommy might even go to a Center for Independent Living, which advocates for people with disabilities civil rights. Whatever he does, he must do something because his independence and dreams will never happen if he silently sits saying nothing.

In the next two scenarios think about what the people should do to advocate. Please use the other sections of this toolkit to help you answer the questions.

Scenario 2: Sara

Sara, 17, was injured as a child in a diving accident and now uses a wheelchair. Over the summer her family moved to a new town. Sara recently got her driver's license and plans to drive to school when it starts. She decides to go check out the school. When she arrives she notices that there is no accessible parking or signage to an accessible entrance.

What can Sara do?

Hint: see ADA Title II: Public Services

Scenario 3: Frank

Frank, 22, has cerebral palsy and just been hired by a company as one of its computer programmers. However, to be efficient at his job he needs some low cost accommodations so he can use his computer. He needs a point it II joystick instead of a mouse and a smaller keyboard. His boss is unwilling to buy the equipment Frank needs.

What can Frank do?

Hint: see ADA Title I: Employment

College: Josie's story



It is hard enough when you don't know what services you need for college or how to get them. But it's even harder when no one else knows either. Getting services for going to college was a time consuming and "trial and error" process. Although I have had excelled throughout high school academically, I had no idea what all I would need to be able to live independently in college. I was a nineteen year old girl with a physical disability called Muscular Dystrophy. Because of my disability, I needed a wheelchair or scooter, a computer for writing, a ventilator during rest, and a service dog. Up to graduating from high school, I had lived with my parents and they had provided me with everything I had needed. Having both a physical and health-related disability, moving to the "real world" was not going to be easy. I had to find services for 24 hour attendant care and nurses, accessibility

to my dorm and classrooms, and accommodations for in-class activities. Preparing to go to college took about two years, but it was worth it.

Even with all of the questions about how I was going to live independently, I was able to not only survive, but thrive at Geneva College. I had 24 hour care from nurses and personal attendants (who were fellow classmates and friends from Geneva.) I learned how to manage my own health care, accommodations, and needs during my four years in college. I was class president for two years in a row, and graduated Summa Cum Laude in May 2007. I discovered that having a disability allowed me to understand the experiences of many individuals, and I was able to share my experiences with others. Now, I am a first year graduate student, living in Pittsburgh and attending the University of Pittsburgh. With faith, hope, and perseverance, goals can be met, and dreams can become reality.

Advocacy in action: Mike's story



I was born with cerebral palsy on April 26, 1981, and ever since my life has been filled with

trials, troubles, and triumphs. But for the purpose of this toolkit on transition I'll speak about my transition from dependence to independence. I was 17 years old when I got hooked up with my local Center for Independent Living in Washington PA called Tri-County Patriots for Independent Living (TRIPIL). The people who worked there had disabilities just like me, and opened my eyes to the truth that our lives are worthwhile to live. We can go to college, we can get jobs, we can date or get married, and do anything else we set our minds to. TRIPIL taught me to do things for myself and not to depend on my family or other agencies to do everything for me. I grew up thinking that I wasn't going to be much because of my disability but my introduction to TRIPIL was the beginning of my understanding that there are no limits to

what my life could be. Through my 10 years of involvement at TRIPIL I have met a lot of people with disabilities who have taught me not to settle for the stereotypes that others have for people with disabilities and to chase my dreams. I also learned that I have a voice and I need to use it to fight for my right to live independently. At 27 years old I now work at TRIPIL as a civil rights specialist advocating for people with disabilities and empowering them with the same knowledge TRIPIL equipped me with over the years so they too can be independent. I have been an advocate, youth pastor, preacher, and the greatest title I have is husband. My marriage to my wife Robin is just another proof that people with disabilities can live like everybody else. People always told me that because of my disability I wouldn't have a job, no one would love me, or my life wouldn't mean much. But my life so far has been blessed. Don't ever let other's views of your disability stop you.

In Summary

Phase Three: Empower Yourself!

Reality check

What is empowerment and why is it important?

Empowerment is a process which helps people gain power. People who are empowered have the knowledge and ability to lead.

Empowerment includes:

- ✓ Having decision-making power
- ✓ Having access to information and resources
- ✓ Having a range of options from which you can make choices
- ✓ Positive outlook on being able to make change
- ✓ Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stereotypes or discrimination

Why is empowerment important?

- ✓ To be able to make decisions about your life
- ✓ To show others that you have control of your own life
- ✓ To take responsibility for your own actions
- ✓ To be true to yourself

Self awareness and self assessment

It's important to evaluate your skills and know what your strengths, weaknesses and coping skills and accommodations can be to support you.

Help is out there

There are agencies out there to help you be empowered. Make the connection!

Drawing the Line

There is a fine line between support and control. Because people with disabilities often need more support to do things than other people, it may be difficult for people to figure out the difference between support and control.

It's your IEP -- you need to be involved!

An IEP is a set of forms that summarizes what your disability is, and the needs you have. It also lists the accommodations you receive and what your goals are for high school and after high school. Since your IEP is all about you, you should play a key role in creating your IEP.

GOLDEN RULE: YOUR IEP IS ALL ABOUT YOU! SPEAK YOUR MIND SO YOU GET WHAT YOU REALLY WANT

Tips for getting services

As a person with a disability, you will be eligible for assistance from a service provider. Use the list of questions to ask any service provider you may come in contact with along the way.

Becoming empowered

Earlier, you read about the definition of empowerment. Now, let's look at some of the ways that you can become more empowered. Supportive people in your life can be a big help. Learn about how youth can empower themselves!



Review Questions

1. What is empowerment and why is it important?
2. What are your strengths, weaknesses and coping skills and accommodations?
3. What agencies can help you be empowered?
4. What is the difference between support and control?
5. What questions can you ask to get the support you need from agencies?
6. What steps will you take to be empowered?



Thank You!

We would like to thank all the organizations and individuals who have supported the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network for the past three years and the production of this Toolkit.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has been a major supporter of the PYLN and we appreciate all of the support, without it we would not be here.

The Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) has been the primary supporter of the PYLN since it began and we cannot show how much we appreciate the help and support through the ups and downs of the group.

Finally thank you to all of the families, adult allies, and YOUTH who have been in the trenches of transition doing all of the work. You are amazing individuals and we know that you all have the knowledge.

In summary, this is our first attempt at the Toolkit and we plan to keep changing it and adding information to meet your needs. So if you want to have a say, please email the PYLN at pyln.gb@gmail.com.

Since we plan to continually update the Toolkit, you can find the latest version online. It's as simple as going to this website: www.sharedwork.org/patransition. You do have to register to use the site, but after that you can go to the site and log in with your email address and password. The page you want to click on in the left side is called the PYLN Secondary Transition Toolkit.