

Transition Times

This issue

BUILDING CAPACITY

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Model Transition Program Steering Committee

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SAVE THE DATE

TSG Meetings

2011

- September 19
- October 24
- November 21
- December 19

2012

- January 23
- February 27
- March 26
- April 23
- May 21
- June 11

Transition Night Benefits Students at Haverling High School

Stacey Brzezinski, Educator and Transition Coordinator

Haverling High School recently hosted an informational event for parents of students with special needs in grades nine through twelve. The evening was an opportunity for parents and students to gather information about the services available to students as they transition from high school to post-secondary options including work or additional schooling.

Representatives from a number of community agencies including the Arc of Steuben, ACCES-VR (formerly known as VESID), AIM, Fingerlakes Parent Network, GST BOCES Transitional Services for Youth, Workforce NY and Steuben County Community Services discussed the services offered by their organizations.

“I found this to be very interesting,” said Parent Marian Gifford. “It was very informative and beneficial for both parents and students.”



Students Trevor Smith and Carol Gould look at information about transitioning from high school to post-secondary plans during an informational event held at the High School.

Student Josie Daley also benefitted from the evening. “It was good! It gave me some ideas and possibilities about my future,” she said.

“I think those who attended the event received valuable information in regard to what agencies are available in our community,” said Teacher and Transition Coordinator Stacey Brzezinski. “Students who take advantage of the services these agencies provide have a much smoother transition from high school.”

Refreshments were provided and several local businesses offered items as door prizes.

Career Fair 2011

Bonnie Goodwin, Educator

On Thursday, April 28, 2011 more than 70 students from local school districts and GST BOCES programs attended a Career Fair held at the ARC of Steuben in Bath. Students were provided with an opportunity to interview with a variety of employers and community agencies from the community.

Career Fair 2011, continued

the community. The interviews were generic in nature designed to allow students to practice interview skills. Some of the community employers who volunteered their time included a grocery store owner, a 911 dispatcher, a graphic designer, a school district, an educator, a counselor and a childcare worker.



Local agencies provided displays and information for students. Presentations included AIM Independent Living Center, Chemung ARC, Catholic Charities, Capabilities, Steuben Employment Services, ACCES VR, Corning Community College and Alfred State College. Students and their teachers learned a great deal and were able to take information home to share with their families.

Teachers were provided with packets in advance of the Career Fair to assist in preparing their students for the day. Students prepared their resume, practiced applications and interview skills, and reviewed appropriate dress for an interview in advance. It was very evident that students were well prepared for the day and the feedback received from the employers and adult agencies was fantastic!



Generally there is funding to support a light lunch for volunteers however this year lunch was provided solely through donations. We are in the process of thanking all those who generously donated their time, expertise and food and are looking forward to another successful Career Fair in 2012!

Transition Support Group A Resource in the Development of Quality Transition Practices

Transition Support Groups (TSGs) developed in the 1990's in the Southern Tier Region. They currently exist across New York State and are viewed as a best practice for district and regional development of quality transition practices.

TSGs meet throughout the year and will address many transition issues including, *continued...*

Transition Support Group A Resource in the Development of Quality Transition Practices

Vocational/Level One Assessments, Agency Role and Contact Information, Community-Based Work Experiences, VESID Referral Process, Student Exit Summaries, IEP Development and Implementation, District Transition Process Development, Drop-Out Prevention, College Readiness and additional topics as identified by participants.

Monthly agendas are participant-driven with input from the steering committee and transition specialist. This is an opportunity for districts and agencies to send key personnel, allowing opportunity to turn-key information back to their colleagues. Participation from school district personnel as well as community providers allows for relationship-building that furthers our purpose of collaboration. District participation supports local practices that are both quality and compliant.

GST BOCES assumes the lead role in facilitating and hosting the monthly TSG meetings. Agendas and details can be found at our website and we encourage anyone interested to attend.

www.modeltransitionprogram.com

Collaboration Supports Student Success

Sue Dorrance, Educator

It may take a village to raise a child, but it takes collaborations with community agencies to help a student transition into independence. One of our GST BOCES ACCESS goals is to involve our students with community supports and services before they leave our program. Students are involved with ACCES-VR (VESID); and in conjunction with Level 1 assessments and Level 1 updates, they have made individual goals for post high school.

We have developed a supportive and collaborative relationship with the AIM Independent Living Center to help our students reach their goals. This relationship has been fostered by a field trip to the AIM Corning office where we learned about their many and varied services and supports. Students were relieved and excited that they could go to one agency, and get many of their needs met. Our students have met with AIM staff to develop independent living plans and explore job opportunities. They are also being assisted with applying for benefits to assist them to live in an independent manner. One student has applied to AIM to work as an aide. Students have also participated in social events with plans to become further involved. Future plans include using the facility for independent living skills training including attending a nutrition class facilitated by Cornell Cooperative Extension, using computers to write resumes, and participating in workshops. AIM also has a partnership with Corning Community College, our students will be able to visit AIM staff during their scheduled CCC times.

The CCC ACCESS students recently participated in the Youth Job Club program sponsored through ProAction. Students had positive feedback regarding the class, but acknowledged that they needed additional practice in writing resumes and attending interviews. We developed a fictitious growing construction company with several job openings. Students will produce a resume tailored to specific job opportunities of interest. This will be followed by individual mock interviews and feedback regarding the job search process. We will also be touring the Corning Workforce office to become acquainted with their services and will attend a resume writing workshop.

Our collaboration and involvement in community services and resources, *continued...*

Collaboration Supports Student Success, *continued*

has benefited our students, and will continue to help them meet their transition goals. As our students prepare to leave high school and educational programs, they need a community services support system to help them be successful. They will enter the community more prepared because those services are already in place and have already been utilized.

The Arc of Steuben

Pat Evia, Referral Coordinator

The Arc of Steuben has been an integral part of our local educational community for over 46 years. They are on the leading edge of exciting and innovative accomplishments, and zealously pursue the label of being the best resource to offer programs and opportunities for the intellectually and developmentally disabled in our region. The Arc of Steuben offers the people we serve the greatest chance of leading independent and successful lives.

The Arc of Steuben provides support and services to children as young as three years old and adults and their families. We offer a wide range of programs and services that include residential programs that foster independent lifestyles, employment programs that empower self-sufficiency, transportation alternatives that provide freedom to be an active part of their community, clinical services to assist with a healthier life and enhanced well-being and Service Coordination to assist with linkage and referral to other services that the family desires. In addition to these services, the Arc of Steuben also provides a variety of programs that support people at home in the community.

The Arc of Steuben's programs offer continuing education and self-advocacy that make independent life styles possible in the area of daily living skills, financial management, crisis support and more importantly, an individualized living plan that is best suited to the person and their needs.

I am working in 15 school districts and available to all parents, students, faculty members, transition coordinators, and anyone else who would like to meet with me.

If you would like more information about the Arc of Steuben, please call Pat Evia (607) 776-4146 ext 2201 or email at pevia@arcofsteuben.org.

Pride, Ambition and Determination

Jo Barlow, School Social Worker

On April 14, GST BOCES Broad Horizons and Elsmere programs welcomed Kim Walters as a special guest speaker. Kim, an Army Veteran and Veteran Olympic Games gold medalist, told us about her personal struggles resulting from a serious car accident that left her paralyzed. She learned that self-pity was not going to give her a meaningful life. She learned to drive a modified vehicle, began volunteering, and worked as an advocate, graduated from Corning Community College and SUNY



Geneseo. Kim has authored articles for disability magazines, won the 2003 New York Senate Achievers Award, and was a 2002 Paul G. Hearne National Finalist for advocacy work in the community. She is a member of the Corning Rotary Club and serves on state and local boards supporting persons with disabilities. *Continued on next page*

“We have developed a supportive and collaborative relationship with the AIM Independent Living Center to help our students reach their goals.”

Pride, Ambition and Determination, continued

Kim shared her personal philosophy, "I believe, I can, and I will." She also follows her own guidelines of Pride, Ambition, and Determination (P.A.D.). She encouraged everyone to follow their dreams and work hard to succeed. She then showed an inspirational video of one of her skydiving experiences.

Kim is working on her master's degree at San Diego State University and is seeking employment as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. We wish her continued success in life.

Horseheads Transition Night: Sweet Success

Brendan McCarthy, Educator

Our 4th Annual Transition Night was held on March 28th this year at the high school's cafeteria. Students, parents, and administrators were treated to a wonderful evening of valuable transition information as well as an expansive dessert bar. The evening consisted of many community agencies sharing information on how they can assist in the transition process for high school and beyond through a brief presentation, a question and answer period, a chance to meet individually with the agency representative, and an opportunity to gather flyers and brochure, all while feasting on cakes, cookies, and an ice-cream sundae bar – all donated by local businesses, grocery stores, and restaurants. Along with the outrageous strawberry cheesecakes, cannolis and brownies, the evening also featured a chance for parents and students to walk away with a gift certificate from an area restaurant. Our restaurant gift certificate give away, valued at over \$450, allowed our participants to leave our Transition Night with not only crucial transition information and a belly full of scrumptious desserts, but also a generous restaurant gift certificate in hand.



This night would not have been possible without the nine agencies that gave up their free time to share their information, their support is awe-inspiring. Equally impressive was the generous donations and support from our community. We are extremely grateful here at Horseheads for the generosity of nearly 30 businesses that made this event a success.

The State Performance Plan Year Six Hildreth Rose

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act required New York State to annually report each school district's performance and/or compliance on 14 indicator areas. These areas included such things as Graduation and dropout rates, performance and participation on state assessments, suspension and timelines in the delivery of services. Often times, we focus solely on our deficits. It is easy to suffer the rate of progress and bemoan the apparent lack of movement. *Continued...*

The State Performance Plan Year Six, continued

The results, however, when reviewed in a longitudinal approach are encouraging. The 2005 New York State cohort graduation rate for SWD was 44.4%. The Greater Southern Tier (GST) BOCES region, made up of 21 school districts, had one third of the school districts (7) exceed this percentage with three districts containing less than 5 students in their cohort and unable to publically report due to confidentiality. The majority of GST districts continue to improve their graduation statistics

You will note the remaining thirteen indicators bare similar results. More students with disabilities are participating in state assessments with improved test results. Suspension and dropout rates, in most schools are decreasing. An increased number of IEPs are being developed to reasonably enable youth to successfully transition into adult life. The dedicated and deliberate work of our local education agencies is making a difference.

During this difficult fiscal time, I encourage you to review your Special Education School District Data Profile. Study your longitudinal results, celebrate your improvements and continue to strive for and meet the rigorous state set targets.

School District Data Profile:

<http://eservices.nysed.gov/sepuprep/>

Conquering SCI Challenges through Self-Empowerment and Self-Advocacy Kimberly Walters, Advocate and Graduate Student

As a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) survivor, you will experience a plethora of emotions early post-injury, and at times, several months and/or years post-injury these emotions will arise again. The degree of emotionality will vary for each individual, but the one thing that will remain constant with the majority of SCI survivors is the common ground of emotions. For most novices SCI survivors – denial, sadness, depression, anger, fear, thoughts of suicide, helplessness, and seeking the answer to the infamous question, "why did this happen to me" – will consume a person's thoughts. Coupled with the financial devastation, loss of gainful employment, independence, friends, high cost of hospitalization, and the introduction to Assistive Technology Devices (ATDs), you will become inundated and overwhelmed beyond words.

I, Kimberly A. Walters, T-5 Complete SCI survivor since June 1993, as a result of an automobile accident, experienced these emotions daily and for many, many weeks post-injury. Within days I learned first-hand the importance of self-advocacy and I discovered this through, *self-empowerment*. As human beings, we all have choices. It is through our choices that we as human beings grow, learn, experience setbacks and achievements and find the courage and strength to be strong advocates for ourselves or remain idle and allow our environment to make choices for us.

The environment is seen as presenting barriers and challenges, but also as stimulating and offering opportunities for accomplishments. ATDs can lead to living a self-sufficient, independent life that will enhance self-esteem, allow an individual the opportunity to become gainfully employed, and, continued . . .

Conquering SCI Challenges through Self-Empowerment and Self-Advocacy, continued

educate society that persons with disabilities are more than capable individuals, if given the opportunity.

Unfortunately, many SCI survivors and persons with disabilities are not properly aligned with the ATDs that will be for the betterment of their well-being. Reasons for this are the medical model philosophy where providers and doctors' believe they know what will work best for the person with no interaction with the patient or family; and people with disabilities lack of knowledge about their rights, their inability to self-advocate, as a result of feeling helpless and the "fear" of voicing their emotions to the medical profession.

I believe self-empowerment, self-advocacy and the personal goal to live an independent, self sufficient daily life with a disability is the equation that differentiates people with disabilities from being over achievers versus "settling" within the scope of their disability. In addition, succumbing to the medical model philosophy, our environment, and the peer pressure as to what AT device will work best. It's these factors that allow oneself to be stereotyped by society as an incapable person. Outcome of these factors is many persons with disabilities bestow limitations on themselves and become resilient in overcoming the challenges a disability can bring to an individual, therefore, the disability becomes the controlling factor—not the person. Without my own self-empowerment, my innate ability to self-advocate efficiently and wanting to live a productive life post-injury, I, too, would have been a person with a disability who "settled." The challenges a disability brings to an individual would become much more difficult to handle on a daily basis and secondary problems could arise—severe depression, helplessness, and a pessimistic outlook on the future. It's imperative that people with disabilities make the choice to take control of their life through their own self-empowerment and self-advocacy—not let the disability control them!

Since my SCI injury, I learned early on that if I didn't advocate for the betterment of myself, I would have been another person who surrendered to the medical model philosophy. The steps that I took to take control of my paralysis were to address issues with the medical profession that I wasn't in agreement with. Issues range from transferring onto a shower bench instead of having a roll-in-shower in my home, being assertive with my state's vocational rehabilitation services that would allow me to live an independent life in my own home with ATD's. My self-empowerment early post-injury allowed me to regain my driver's license four months after being discharged from the hospital and maintain a highly independent life with no assistance from a personal care giver the last fourteen plus years. It's the fear of losing my self-empowerment, independence, and the inability to overcome various challenges a disability brings to an individual, which has allowed me to have control over my life—not my paralysis. This was accomplished through my ability to self-advocate and not allowing others to be my voice.

If you remain silent, you will lose your own self-empowerment, the freedom to make choices for yourself and the possibility of not living an independent, self sufficient life. It shouldn't take a person's highest level of determination to be treated equally in our society. When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into legislation, July 26, 1990, there were six million businesses that were non-ADA compliant. As of July 2007, there is five and a half million businesses still non-ADA compliant (source: University of Alabama). Without optimism and interdependence, persons with disabilities will be faced with the continuous daily challenge to proving themselves as capable individuals to society.

I believe to have an inclusive society its imperative that each person with a disability, their family, friends and peers to educate society on the capabilities of persons with disabilities. Knowledge is power only if it's applied. Therefore, self-empowerment, self-advocacy and continuous education of society is the key to breaking down barriers for people with disabilities today and future generations.

Steps to take are:

- Know your rights under the ADA
- Avoid using negative connotation (handicap, disabled) when referring to one self. These words express broken and/or put at a disadvantage). People with disabilities are not broken or are they disadvantaged individuals.
- Self-Advocating for one self and educating others on the barriers you may encounter daily
- Take training courses on self-advocacy (contact local Independent Living Centers, research the internet & contact state rehabilitation services)
- Remain positive, active and healthy
- Set personal goals to achieve
- Believe in your abilities
- Never state, "I can't!" Instead, "I can, I am and I will!"

As noted in Dr. Marcia Scherer, author, "*Living In the State of Stuck*," she placed great emphasis on the medical profession to understand, manage, respect and educate family and friends the importance of a SCI survivor's plethora of emotions they will experience during their hospital rehabilitation. I can attest to the fact that all of these factors are crucial to an individual's rehabilitation.

Due to the severity of my injuries—neck was broken at C-5-C-6 and fracture all the way up to C-1, spine was broken in thirty-two countable breaks, every rib was broken but two, pelvis was fractured, left lung bruised, Spinal Cord severed at T-5, and massive internal bleeding. My rehabilitation was seventeen weeks long, the first nine weeks I was unable to sit-up no higher than a forty-five degree angle. It was during these nine weeks that the medical profession allowed me to experience a "safety zone" within the hospital environment. Safety zone consisted of never experiences the barriers that wheelchair users encounter daily. Inaccessible curb cuts, restrooms, accessible aisles in establishments, accessible parking, and the constant stare of society members outside of the hospital environment. It wasn't until my tenth week during my rehabilitation stay that I was taken outside of hospital grounds to a local McDonald's restaurant. This first encounter was an educating experience for me. Curb cuts were no where near the restaurant entrance, instead my nurse and I had to wheel a block to find a curb cut and then back track to the restaurant. Once inside, I felt the "disability laser stare" by patrons in the restaurant. When ordering our food, the cashier would look at my nurse and ask her what I would like to order. After receiving our food it was extremely difficult for me to maneuver around to find a table to sit at, as a result of narrow aisle space. Needless to say, I didn't enjoy my first encounter outside of hospital grounds and I was eager to get back to my "safety zone." Little did I know that these encounters upon discharge from rehabilitation would happen often and frequent. It was this experience at the local McDonald's that I discovered my own self-empowerment, self-advocacy and have refused to let go of it ever since. Instead, my self-empowerment and self-advocacy skills strengthen daily, as a result of my choice to strengthen it.

It's imperative that the medical team, social workers, family and friends encourage and support the SCI survivor to venture outside of the hospital grounds early and often post-injury. Social activities such as eating out at restaurants, attending a movie theater, visiting malls, riding a transportation bus, visiting local parks, is important to the person's rehabilitation recovery. Remaining in a hospital environment for days on end is not healthy for anyone and can lead to severe depression early post-injury. Social experiences will provide the SCI person with knowledge, confidence and educating their family and friends on the barriers that are still in existence in our society. I believe more social interaction outside of hospital grounds coupled with their own self-empowerment and self-advocacy is one of many key factors for a SCI survivor to live an independent and meaningful life post-injury. Without self-empowerment, self-advocacy and the determination to never quit, the challenges a SCI survivor will encounter throughout their lifetime will only be more challenging, at times, very debilitating and a life of "settling" within the scope of your paralysis and/or disability.

When we as a society realize that people with disabilities are capable of anything, then we tend to create opportunities that are universally inclusive. Negative thinking holds that life with a disability is not worth living, but in an inclusive society, people who find themselves with a disability are equipped with the knowledge that the opportunity to live a positive and meaningful life awaits them! Self-Empowerment and self-advocacy is the key to society realizing that persons with disabilities are capable individuals and the key for persons with disabilities achieving their future goals and living a meaningful and productive life.