



Information Bites...

**Bite sized chunks of information for families
that include a member with a disability**

Transitions for Teens with Special Needs

Encouraging Teens to Think About Transition

(adapted from Lasting Gifts, 2000)

Teens need to think about the things that they would like to do in the future; teens with exceptionalities are no different. The following are some ideas for parents that will assist them in helping their child think about and plan for the future:

- Begin thinking about your teen's future in a holistic way that includes much more than just a work placement.
- Help your teen to think about adult life, that is, interests, what matters, with whom friendships or other relationships might be, or how time would be spent.
- Think of planning for the future as a process. Focus on accomplishing small steps towards a goal. Remember that once a decision is made, it doesn't mean that it can't be changed if things don't work out or if your child changes his or her mind.
- Watch your teen to see what he or she loves to do and encourage your teen to develop this as a natural strength. Emphasize these strengths when you begin to consider employment options.
- Encourage yourself to think beyond what you think is realistic for your teen's future life, so you won't leave out any options. You may be surprised.
- Be very conscious of the skills your teen is demonstrating, for example, self-awareness skills, life skills, job skills. Help develop these skills even more. They can be a great source of support in future life.
- Allow your child the opportunity to make mistakes. We all learn from our mistakes and become better people because of them. In learning to deal with mistakes in a positive way, your teen will be learning a very important skill necessary for his or her future ability to be independent.
- Encourage your teen to volunteer and gain work experience.
- Listen to what your teen is telling you about his or her dreams for the future.

Key Factors for a Successful Transition

(Adapted from: *People With Disabilities Making Transitions*, Canadian Labour Force Development Board, 1994)

The promotion of successful transition starts with all children receiving a good education. There are a number of other factors and practices that have been identified as important to the successful transition of youth with disabilities (and all youth). These factors and practices include:

- **Schools and school boards** take seriously the importance of quality inclusive education. This means that youth with disabilities learn in regular classrooms and actively participate in classroom and school activities. Having a quality education means that youth with disabilities learn subjects and skills that will prepare them for work and adult life after high school.
- **People with disabilities** learn to make decisions for themselves about their futures. Youth with disabilities learn to speak for themselves, set their own goals and be active participants in planning for ways to achieve those goals.
- **Family and Friends** of youth with disabilities play an important role in planning for the transition for school to work and life in the community. Families bring insight and commitment to the planning process, and should be actively involved throughout their child's school years.
- **Transition planning** takes place long before an individual finishes high school. Transition planning is well coordinated and based on achieving specific goals for youth with disabilities.
- **Youth with disabilities** have useful work experiences during the high school years. In the elementary and middle school years, students are exposed to work through regular career education programs and activities. Work experience and career education are most effective when there are well-developed links between school and the local business community.

Since many youth with disabilities may need some ongoing support and services to work in the community after high school, steps are taken during the school years to make sure these supports and services are available. Links with people who can provide supports and services are made during the transition planning process.



Yellowknife Association for Community Living - Family Project

4905 – 48th Street, Box 981, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2N7

Phone: (867) 766-4295 Fax: (867) 669-7826 E-mail: inclusion@ykacl.ca Website: www.ykacl.ca

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