



STEP AHEAD NEWSLETTER

Summer 2021

From the Executive Director

Hello STEP Friends!

Could it be that summer is already here? This is one of my favorite times of the year. Backyard barbeques and a good book are how I like to spend these long summer evenings. Of course, we know our STEP families always stay busy, but we hope you're having some relaxation time, and maybe even getting out or planning trips with COVID-19 restrictions loosening up.

Welcome to our Summer 2021 Newsletter. As you'll see, the theme of this edition is transitioning from youth to adulthood, also known as "life after high school." We wanted to give you these articles and resources in July, in the hopes that the students in your life -- if they are at or nearing this milestone -- might take advantage of this information as they prepare for moving into the "real world" of post-secondary training or education, employment opportunities, and decisions around where and how they'll live.

Here at STEP, we take this subject very seriously. We've devoted thousands of staff hours training youth in person and virtually, so they understand how their lives will change as they begin to "adult." We have an archive of transition materials that can be viewed and downloaded from our website. But, if you're like me, you like having information all in one place. This Summer 2021 Newsletter is a "one-stop" overview of what issues need to be considered.

Here you'll find information about college and trade school choices, the role of a Disability Services office, a look back at year one by a sophomore with a disability, the importance of self-advocacy, the "reality check" of practicing necessary adult skills, and "what's out there to help" these youth as they begin to live life more independently.

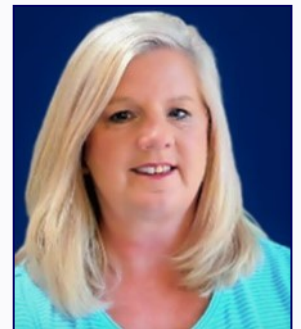
Because a few of our STEP Team members have sons and daughters in this exact phase of life, we know how challenging this transition can be. However, starting as early as possible is one key to a successful transition. So, even if your children are still in elementary school, keep reading...life after high school will be here before you know it! STEP's primary goal is for families to begin having conversations about opportunities, resources, and expectations for our youth with disabilities as they embark on taking charge of their futures.

As always, please feel free to reach out to our Regional Directors or the main STEP office in Greeneville if you want to delve further into any of the important topics presented here.

Please stay safe!

Karen Harrison

Executive Director, STEP



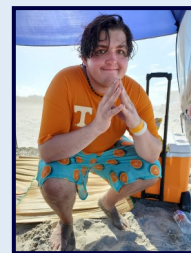
STEP UP TO THE PLATE (SUTP) —YOUTH LEADERS AS LEARNERS AND TEACHERS

STEP has been training youth with disabilities across the state for many years, particularly in transitioning from high school to adulthood. This year we're identifying a group of young people with disabilities to help inform our team about what information and support they would find useful, and where they go to learn and connect. Our goals are to organize a youth **STEP Up to the Plate Youth Council**; convene a remote, one-hour Information Sharing event; provide opportunities for our Youth Leaders to "use their voices" by contributing to our materials, our quarterly Newsletter, our social media engagement, future trainings and conferences, and in other ways we haven't even considered yet!



This will allow our **SUTP** members to get involved, share their expertise, expand their networks, and embellish their résumés with activities that will appeal to future employers or recruitment staff at post-secondary schools. We value the expertise and time of youth, so participants will be paid for their involvement. At this time we have three stellar individuals on board, and we are seeking 2-3 more. If you know of a young person who might benefit from this opportunity, please have them contact Ned Andrew Solomon at nedandrew.solomon@tnstep.org.

LOOKING BACK AT A FIRST YEAR IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION A Q & A WITH CHRISTIAN RICE, FUTURE PROGRAM SOPHOMORE



STEP Newsletter: Why did you decide to apply to the FUTURE program?

Christian Rice: I chose the future program because I wanted to have the college experiences like all my friends, and become more independent.

SN: What were you hoping you would get out of the FUTURE program, or how were you thinking it would benefit you in the short- and long-term?

CR: Long term, I want to find a job that I'm good at and that makes me happy. FUTURE gives me ideas and experiences to help me find these things out. Short term, I'd like some support for living in an apartment. FUTURE has an independent living program where peer mentors help us learn to live on our own.

SN: Do you have an idea of what you would like to do after college?

CR: I haven't really decided that. Maybe I will be an animation person or a technology mechanic. I want to live on my own with roommates.

SN: How did you feel when you were accepted into the program?

CR: When I got the acceptance letter I was really happy and I thought about my great grandfather, George Moony, the guy who created the Vol Navy and the voice of the Vols in the '60s. I can only imagine how proud he must be of his great grandson going to UT.

SN: During the first year, what kinds of classes did you take?

CR: I took an animation class which I loved because the teacher was very nice and helped me. I took an ASL (American Sign Language) class as well for my friend who is deaf, and who I will move in with in the Fall semester in an apartment. I also took food science, swimming, soccer, and physical training. We take three FUTURE classes on digital literacy, life skills, career and life planning. I had an internship at the school cafeteria that I didn't like.

SN: What are you looking forward to the most about Year Two?

CR: I'm most excited about living close to campus so I can do more on campus while living on my own.

SN: What skills are you hoping to develop during this program?

CR: I want to learn how to cook better, live on my own, meet new people, and find a good job that is very social, because I love talking to people.

SN: Did you have opportunities to get involved with the college community in general, outside of your work in the FUTURE program? If so, what kinds of activities did you participate in?



CR: I'm in a fraternity called Chi Alpha and a club called Best Buddies, where they pair you with another person. In Chi Alpha we talk about Jesus and God and Christianity. I'm looking to join an animation club because I'll be living near campus. I also hung out a lot at the student union. I loved going to baseball games and out to eat with lunch buddies. I learned to ride the KAT bus and the T-bus, and the trollies downtown. I really love riding my scooter on campus and talking to people. I love being on campus.

To find out more about Tennessee's Post-Secondary programs for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, visit tnihealliance.org.

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WHAT'S OUT THERE TO HELP ME?

For youth transitioning to adulthood and life after high school, numerous resources within our state can help. We've divided this information into broad categories, with links for you to research which ones seem the most beneficial for you and your child. As always, please feel free to reach out to STEP for additional information about any of these entities.

Post-Secondary Education

We know that college isn't for everyone. But for those who want to continue classroom learning after high school, there are some great options. Beyond our state's private colleges and universities, Tennessee has an excellent and robust **Community College** system. Tennessee is also home to six **Post-Secondary Programs for Students with IDD**, which provide a campus learning experience for those who graduated without a regular high school diploma. In addition, Tennessee has the exceptional **Tennessee Promise** program, which in certain circumstances can provide two years of free tuition. For Community Colleges: www.tbr.edu/institutions/community-colleges . For Post-Secondary Programs for students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD): tnihealliance.org/ . For the Tennessee Promise program: www.tn.gov/collegepays/money-for-college/state-of-tennessee-programs/tennessee-promise-scholarship.html .

Post-Secondary Training

After high school, some youth decide to focus on a trade and a career path. Tennessee's **Colleges of Applied Technology**, located conveniently throughout the state, provide training in many practical fields, including cosmetology, auto mechanics, graphic design, information technology, heating and air conditioning, and many more. In Smyrna, the **Tennessee Rehabilitation Center**, funded by **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)**, provides on-site training in a number of fields, as well as residential housing to develop independent living skills. For Colleges of Applied Technology: www.tbr.edu/institutions/colleges-applied-technology . For the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center: www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/trc-smyrna.html . For Vocational Rehabilitation: www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/vocational-rehabilitation.html .

Employment

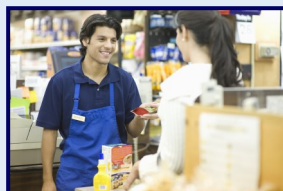
Now is an excellent time to get a job. After the economy's downturn during the worst of the pandemic, businesses are bouncing back and needing employees. An excellent way to find out what employers are looking for, and what industries have the most openings, is to check out Tennessee's **American Job Centers**. For those who are eligible, the aforementioned **VR** has supports for individuals with disabilities who want to begin working or return to the workforce. In some situations, VR can also help with post-secondary tuition. For Tennessee's American Job Centers: www.tn.gov/workforce/jobs-and-education/job-search1/find-local-american-job-center.html .

Independent Living

For some youth with disabilities, finishing high school means looking for a place and a way to live outside of the family home, whether that's alone in a house or an apartment, or with roommates sharing expenses. Tennessee's **Centers for Independent Living (CIL)** are a great stop on that journey. The CILs provide several resources, including training, benefits counseling, social and learning opportunities, and peer-to-peer support. For Tennessee's Centers for Independent Living: www.silctn.org/contact-us.html .

Financial Support

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues designed to help people with disabilities who have little or no income, and provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. In addition, the **Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE)** program allows for tax-advantaged savings accounts that an eligible individual with a disability can establish and use to pay for qualified disability-related expenses. For Social Security Income: www.ssa.gov/ssi/ . For the ABLE program: abletreasury.tn.gov/ .



SKILL BUILDING FOR ADULTHOOD

by Ned Andrew Solomon, STEP Communications Support

As parents of youth with disabilities (I have helped raise three to adulthood), we can sometimes, inadvertently, hold back our children. Out of concern for their safety, welfare, and fear of their failure, we hesitate to provide them with potential opportunities for growth. Yet, other adults in their lives might have higher expectations for our children than we do; it is vital that we “listen” to their perspectives.

Although these basic skills are essential in order to be viewed and treated as an adult, they are often overlooked and rarely practiced. As parents, it is our job to help our youth develop these abilities to begin to take control of their lives.

Self-Advocacy

“Self-advocacy” is another term for “speaking up for yourself.” In our experiences working with youth with disabilities across the state, we find that many are reluctant to speak up about their needs and desires, and too few can describe how their disabilities impact their lives. Unless their parents will live forever or be by their sides for every situation, they will need to develop the ability to make choices and take part in the decisions that will determine their futures. They should be able to talk about their limitations, so the proper supports can be put in place to promote success in a training, education, or job setting. If they are not verbal, they need to identify a form of alternative communication that will allow them to “speak up” when an aspect of their life needs changing, to ensure they are not abused, taken advantage of, or just plain unhappy. As we tell youth in our trainings, “if you don’t speak up for yourself, nothing changes.”



The number one thing we can do as parents is to stop speaking or responding for our children, and assuming that we know what they want and need.

Teaching, Not Doing

Many families are caught unprepared when their sons or daughters stop going to high school somewhere between 18 and 22, the school support services end, and the youth have not yet learned the skills they need to take care of themselves or live in a setting away from the family home. In too many cases, decisions have not been made about a young adult’s next step: will I continue schooling? Will I learn a trade? Will I live on my own or with a roommate? Will I have a job? Are my parents going to support me forever?

While our children are still under our roofs, this is the perfect time to teach them how to “adult.” When training youth, we’ve been enormously impressed by youth with disabilities who make meals for themselves, do household chores, clean up their rooms, help take care of siblings and pets, and even do their laundry from start to finish. Yet, at the same time, we encounter many other youth with disabilities who have no household responsibilities, take no part in their meal planning or making, don’t have a method for waking up on their own, and whose parents or older siblings still do their laundry.

We call this a “missed opportunity,” and having “low expectations.” As much as we love our young adults, we are doing them a disservice by not teaching them some basic skills, which inadvertently can keep them dependent, and squelch their self-esteem, sense of accomplishment, and competence. It can also create “learned helplessness,” defined as a condition in which a person suffers from a feeling of powerlessness, thought to be one of the underlying causes of depression.

The most important thing we can do as parents is identify opportunities for our children to learn from us, and stop doing things that they can learn to do for themselves.



AGENCY IN FOCUS: UT MEMPHIS DISABILITY RESOURCES
Successfully Transitioning Accommodations from K-12 to Higher Education
by Amanda Rodino, Assistant Director, Access Services & Adaptive Technology

When students with disabilities graduate from high school, they often have questions about how their accommodations will transition to college. Every technical school, college, and university that receives federal funding must provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. This applies to both public and private schools. Prospective students and their families need to understand the process for requesting accommodations in college, as there are some notable differences from K-12.

College Admissions Process

Any student applying to a post-secondary institution must meet that school’s admission criteria. The disability services office typically plays no role in admissions, but can answer general questions about the process. Accommodations officially begin once the student has been admitted and registers with the disability services office.

Connecting with the Disability Services Office

Students are encouraged to connect with the disability services office early – possibly even before making their final decision about where they will attend college. Learning more about the disability services office can sometimes help students make that final decision.

At the University of Memphis, we recommend that students connect with us no later than the summer before they plan to start college. This allows the student to get updated documentation, and helps us plan for accommodations at new student orientation and consult on possible classes. Although students can register with the disability services office and request accommodations at any point in the semester, they are not retroactive, so we encourage students to have their accommodations in place by the first day of classes.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Student

One of the biggest differences between accommodations in high school versus college is the student’s role in the process. Unlike high school, the student must self-identify as a person with a disability and request accommodations. When meeting with the disability services office at their college, students will be expected to describe their disabilities and limitations, the educational impact of those disabilities and limitations, and their history of accommodations.

Another change is the information that a professor or staff member can share with a college student’s parents or family. Colleges are bound by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. This means the college cannot share information about the student without the student’s permission. All communication from the disability services office will go directly to the student.

Examples of Accommodations

Accommodations are individualized to each student to address the barriers they may experience in college. Some examples of common accommodations include extended test time, alternate format course materials, notetaking assistance, and ASL (American Sign Language) interpreting/captioning. Additionally, accommodations can change throughout a student’s time at the college – sometimes even within one semester.

A LIBRARY OF STEP TRANSITION RESOURCES

If you have a youth/young adult transitioning to adulthood, STEP has a wide range of materials and resources to help plan for a successful transition from high school to adult life.

Videos and Webinars

Transition to Adulthood – 5 Things You Can COUNT On

Handout: bit.ly/Trans-to-Adulthood-Five-Points

Facebook Video: bit.ly/Transition-to-Adulthood-5-Things-to-Count-On-Video

STEP Booklets and One-Page Guides:

Transition to Adult Life Guides

bit.ly/STEP-Transition-Guides-Complete-Set

Diploma and Postsecondary Options

bit.ly/diploma-postsecondary-options

Resources to Help with Transition Planning

bit.ly/transition-planning-resources

Dude, Where's My Transition Plan booklet

bit.ly/STEPDudeBook

Decision Making 101 Guide

bit.ly/decision-making-101

STEP YouTube On-Demand Training Series – Planning for Life After High School

bit.ly/Planning-for-Life-After-HS-Video

Fun Hands-On Activities:

Dream Building and Budgeting Activity Cards

- An effective tool for students who have fine motor and communication needs
- Gives students a visual that represents a variety of post-school outcomes and allows them to express what is important to them
- Aids in the development of long-term goals

Invite STEP to come to your school or facility for an on-site or virtual Dream Building and/or Show Me the Money Budgeting session. Email your request for an on-site or virtual session to information@tnstep.org.

Other Transition Resources

Getting Help with Making Choices

bit.ly/getting-help-making-choices

Reality Check-list

bit.ly/step-reality-checklist

Everyone Has an Important Role

bit.ly/step-transition-planning-roles

Additional Links

bit.ly/transition-resources-links

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