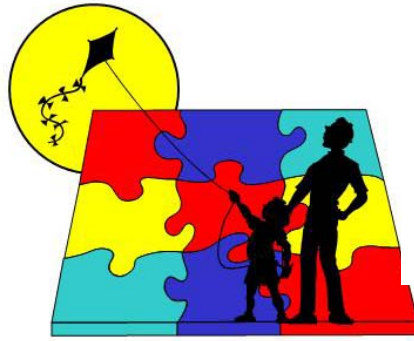


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ACT Autism Community Together of Northeast Indiana

January-February 2009

Looking Forward

Happy 2009! Did you make any resolutions? Well we here at ACT are making one of our new year's resolutions about looking forward. What does the future hold for our children with autism when they become adults? What kinds of services are available for adults with disabilities in our community? What does the transition process from high school to work look like? What are some of the things we should be doing now, regardless of the age of my child with autism, to prepare for this transition? What are employers looking for from applicants with disabilities? What insight can we gain from parents who have already traveled through this process? These are just a few of the many questions that we hope to answer

This newsletter contains articles from several agencies that operate in our community. I would like to thank the contributors from each of the organizations in this issue for their time and effort not only for their article, but for their service to the disability community. Your dedicated service to our children is greatly appreciated!

So cheers! We are looking forward to and working towards a brighter future for children and adults with autism!

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Transition Partners of Northeast Indiana

By Randy Wolf

Did you know that there is a group of agencies and individuals who get together to help educate parents, guardians, students and other professionals on what to expect during the transition process during high school and beyond?

Transition Partners of Northeast Indiana is a partnership of community members dedicated to providing resources, education and training to those involved in the transition process.

Transition Partner's members include: community training, education and employment providers, rehabilitation services including Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation, area school systems and teachers, advocacy groups, and other support providers.

TPNEI, for short, meets monthly to plan, discuss ideas, share information and keep everyone informed about events going on with their agencies and in the community.

Throughout the year TPNEI hosts several informational lectures open to the public covering topics such as the Transition IEP, Medicaid Waiver and Case Management, Social Security and Guardianship.

See TPNI on page 7

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

By Susan Crowell

I had a great opportunity to sit down and talk at length with representatives from Vocational Rehabilitation Services and became a lot more familiar with the transition process here in northeast Indiana. Very quickly I realized that this can be quite confusing for parents and I asked them to give me their list of most important things that parents need to do in order to be prepared for the transition process.

First and foremost they stressed that parents in their child's junior year ASK their school to have their intakes by VR. Many schools believe that VR is only for high-functioning kids. This is WRONG! Vocational Rehabilitation has 5 different tracks

1. College or other training
2. Self-employment
3. Job Placement (no long term support)
4. Supported Employment (long term support)
5. Maintaining Employment (intervene if problem)

Many parents are concerned about losing benefits if their child earns too much money and therefore just avoid the problem by not seeking employment. VR has the Benefits Information Network Referral to help make sure clients are not in danger of losing any benefits by becoming gainfully employed.

See Voc Rehab on page 7

January-February

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				15	16	17
18	19	20	21 Learn With Me "Aprende Conmigo" Parent Group for Hispanic Parents	22 Transition and Autism Dr. Cathy Pratt Bluffton In	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30 Building Skills during Play and Family Routines	31
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12 ACT Walk to Talk Planning Meeting 7:00pm	13	14
15	16 Autism Parent Support Group Dupont Library 7pm	17	18	19	20	21 Sibling Support Group 1pm Higher Grounds St Joe Village
22	23	24	25 The Role of Grandparents in Autism 6:30 Parkview North	26	27	28

January 21 "Aprende Conmigo" Parent Support Group for Hispanics. Indianapolis. 6-7:30pm. Autism Society of Indiana 317- 685-2973

January 22 Dr Cathy Pratt Transition and Autism Bluffton High School. Educators session 4-6pm Family session 7-9pm. RSVP 1-800-234-7811

January 30 Building Skills during play and family routines 11am-1pm Easter Seals ARC Ft Wayne

February 12 ACT Walk to Talk Planning Meeting 7pm Starbucks across from Glenbrook

February 16 Autism Parent Support Group Dupont Library 7:00pm
joe.ostrowski@steeldynamics.com

February 17 Sibling Support Group 1pm Higher Grounds St Joe Village Ft Wayne

February 21 Sibling support group Middle School and High School age. 1:00pm Higher Grounds St Joe Village Ft Wayne
carlanunez24@yahoo.com

February 25 The Role of Grandparents in Autism 6:30pm Parkview North Sue Watson 637-7225

PLAN AHEAD!



Building a Better Tomorrow

Best Practices in the Support of People with Disabilities
Second Annual Conference

June 9, 10, and 11, 2009
at the Sheraton Sports Complex in
Kansas City, MO

More information at www.bbtcon.com

Goodwill Industries of Northeast Indiana

By Randy Wolf

Did you know that Goodwill Industries of Northeast Indiana provides Employment Services for people with disabilities?

Since 1937, Goodwill has been providing vocational evaluation; job readiness training; job placement and support services to individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment in the ten counties of northeast Indiana.

Goodwill's **Job Placement Program** assists clients to secure and maintain competitive employment commensurate with interests, skills, needs, and abilities. Job Placement is an organized, planned process and consists of services which include, but are not limited to:

- Completing Job Applications
- Resume and Cover Letter Writing
- Job Placement
- Job Coaching
- Interviewing Techniques and Questions
- Mock Interviews and Video Taping and Playback
- Effective Communications
- Job Development
- Follow Up
- Referral Services
- Vocational Evaluation

All placement services are varied and are based upon the Plan for Employment and Supports of the individual served.

The **Supported Employment Program** assists persons with the most significant disabilities who require ongoing support, on and/or off the job, in order to choose, obtain and retain paid employment in integrated settings. Services assist in, but are not limited to:

- Helping clients perform to their highest potential
- Basic job skills training / pre-employment counseling
- Identify and obtain reasonable accommodations or special needs
- Acclimate successfully to the job
- Manage work related issues and needs
- On and Offsite Job Coaching

The level of support is continually evaluated and adjusted based upon the individual needs of the client. The goal is for the client to become a successful, independent member of the employers business.

Goodwill receives it's referrals for services from the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration's Vocational Rehabilitation Services. 260-424-1595

For Further information, please contact Randy Wolf, Client Services Director.

The goal is for the client to become a successful, independent member of the employer's business.

Allen County Public Library An Employers Perspective on Hiring People with Disabilities

By Judy Dunahue

The Allen County Public Library has a long history of hiring people with disabilities and we have been very fortunate to find disabled people who have strong skills in areas for which we have a need. We don't hire people to train them in basic skills, but we employ them for the skills they already have and strive to accommodate any disabilities which might hamper them in other arenas.

Our experience of hiring people with disabilities includes; people with limited skills in English, autism, blind, deaf, spina bifida, paraplegic and mentally ill. These individuals do a wide range of jobs such as computer programming, and locating and re-shelving library materials. We have a good working relationship with agencies in town that find jobs for the disabled.

The Allen County Public Library always welcomes applications from people with disabilities who can perform the essential functions of any job. Unfortunately, the library has been forced to reduce its work force to meet declining income projections because of property tax caps, so we are hiring very few people at this time.

We employ for the skills they have and strive to accommodate any disabilities which might hamper them in other arenas

AWS: Transitioning from School to Work Starts...Now!

By Lynne Gilmore

The last day of high school and graduation. What a triumphant achievement and joyous occasion for the graduate with autism! But then comes the inevitable question – what’s next? Employment is what many high school graduates and their families turn to for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is to have a meaningful day and the satisfaction of earning a paycheck.

For more than 40 years, AWS’ Employment Services has placed thousands of people with developmental disabilities in jobs and has consistently had one of the highest job placement rates statewide. Our Employment Consultants understand what is needed for a successful job placement and are diligent in finding just the right match for long-term success. Most important is that the job seeker makes a practical decision for what is most feasible.

Individual attention is basis for success

Over the years, we have worked with many individuals with autism from high functioning to high needs and have helped them find employment. The most important aspect of job placement is getting to know the job seeker very, very well. This begins with the person’s team – the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, case manager, service provider and family – that should function collaboratively and communicate effectively in order to facilitate and support job-seeking activities. Spending time with the person, asking questions and learning about his/her environment is fundamental to our approach of individualized placement.

If the person does not have a job preference, we might conduct a community-based evaluation in which he/she tries out a job for a week, or job shadow to determine interest. Next we help the person develop and write a résumé, fill out a job application and hold mock interviews. The Employment Consultant accompanies the individual to the actual interview. Throughout the process, the job seeker can attend AWS’ Job Club to learn from others about their experiences and develop sources of support from their peers.

Sometimes an intermediate step – such as pre-vocational workshop employment – can help with the transition process. It can also be the employment of choice for individuals with high needs who may find community employment unsatisfactory. In a safe and supportive environment, individuals learn what the world of work is like through the workshop environment by acquiring new skills, understanding responsibility and working with others. All of the skills developed in the workshop are designed to be transferable skills for work in the community. AWS’ pre-vocational workshop is “real world” work and employees earn a wage based on productivity.

With work comes independence and responsibility. Helping the individual understand and cope with these things is another part of the transition process. For example, how to get to work must be decided and often it means learning how to use the public transportation system. Responsibility might translate into practicing personal hygiene, making appropriate clothing choices and learning what or what not to say at work.

Cultivating the right employer

Without the right employer and the right environment, job placement is rarely successful. The Employment Consultant is continuously cultivating employers to find just the right match, and it is not unusual that a little innovation and creativity is used to develop a job opportunity. For example, a job might be too complex for the individual but separated into fewer steps would make it feasible. As the individual becomes adept at the job, the job could expand.

When it comes to the work environment, finding a structured environment is the goal but more often than not, there are changes that cannot be controlled and to which the person must adapt. To help the person manage change and the employer to understand behaviors, it is important to know the behavioral interventions and behavior management techniques that are effective to ensure a successful, and hopefully long-term, placement.

As the Employment Consultant talks with prospective employers, educating them and co-workers about autism is vitally important to a harmonious work environment. This is also the time when potential issues about the work environment can be addressed and solutions implemented.

[See AWS on page 7](#)

Our goal is to make “what’s next?” a question leading to increasing success in the workplace.

Easter Seals Arc Plus Transition Dedication Equals SUCCESS

By Tony Belton

As the saying goes, “when you have lemons, make lemonade.” This particular quote has a bit of relevance to the Blakey family of Decatur, Indiana.

Gene and Deana Blakey are the parents of an eighteen year old young man with autism. Zackary, being in his fourth year of high school is no stranger to subtly displaying signs that a transition is soon to take place where he will have to occupy his time somewhere other than school.

Easter Seals Arc of Northeast Indiana shines in transition services with a variety of options for those going through the same trials as the Blakey family. We do *everything*, ranging from attending case conferences and informing families, students, and teachers on available resources to those transitioning from high school to the workforce or to some type of adult day center; to personally escorting individuals to the local BDDS (Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Services) offices, Medicaid, insurance, social security, and vocational rehabilitation offices, etc, to help fill out the necessary enrollment forms.

We also hold transition fairs and parent information nights when we invite one or several representatives from different social agencies to create a more intimate, one on one feeling between the agency and the individual.

One of our strong suites is our ability to cater to each individual person and case. All the direction and assistance that we offer is absolutely client specific. If a person is more severely handicapped our main priority is not to get them into the workforce, but to focus on an approach that will give them the best quality of life and the best success for the level of independence that they desire. If the person is higher functioning, then we develop an IEP, individual education plan, and try to find the best solution for transitioning from high school to secondary education or the workforce.

Recently, Easter Seals Arc has been awarded a \$95,000 Earmark Work Incentive Training Grant from the Federal government for job training or placement for those with Aspergers in community private employment. While the program is not yet fully developed, we intend to include specialized training for the participants in work and general employment skills; in addition to providing training for employers to help assimilate these individuals into their workplace. The program will commence during the first quarter of 2009 and conclude approximately twelve months later. It is the intent of this project to assist each participant in obtaining gainful employment and in retaining that employment over an extended period of time.

Gene, Deana and Zackary Blakey were fortunate to have found Easter Seals Arc and to be paired up with Leah Parris, community liaison at Easter Seals who works with high school students transitioning from school to the workforce.

“She informed us of the grant that was available to offer job coaching to eligible students. This opportunity would help Zack during the transition to obtain the job skills to be successful at the next level once he has graduated. Naturally, we were very anxious to get Zack started in this experience but didn’t have an employer lined up right then.

This past summer, a friend of our family, who owns his own business stated they were expanding. Just by chance, my husband Gene asked if they had anything Zack could do to help out. In thinking about this possibility, our friends had wondered what Zack’s job duties would include and who would have the task of training him. Gene explained that Leah would be right along side Zack to coach him and all that was needed was to inform her of the task to be done. She would then provide the leadership and encouragement necessary to motivate Zackary.

The first day was met with huge resistance. We introduced Zack to the work place and showed him the task we wanted him to do. Even the second visit was met with resistance, but a bit more progress was gained. Every day Zack came to work, a sense of acceptance to his responsibilities was seen and Leah was able to guide him to improvement with tasks that at first, seemed impossible to do. Leah has provided delightful reports of Zack’s progress and has focused on the ultimate goal of having Zack become an asset and a valued employee to any company choosing to employ him

[See ARC on page 7](#)

One of our strong suits is our ability to cater to each individual person and case. All the direction and assistance that we offer is absolutely client specific

Finding the way to adulthood: A parent perspective on transition

By Kay Cozad

I know my daughter's journey with autism is ongoing, as is my own...but we remain undaunted in the face of challenge.

Transitioning from the structured confines of academic life to adulthood is no easy task for anyone. However, so many of our children challenged on the autism spectrum face unique issues that require intensive information gathering and networking to accomplish the transition successfully.

My beautiful 23-year-old daughter Sara was not identified as having Asperger's Syndrome until she was in fourth grade. Prior to her diagnosis, her young life was steeped in frustration due to what we now understand as sensory integration, attention and social skill deficits. Twenty years ago, no one seemed to know how to help her navigate those challenges.

Early intervention was not as prevalent an option in those days as it is now. Sara and I struggled with the educational system that was just on the cusp of discovering the mysterious and pervasive nature of this neurological spectrum.

Each school year was a new adventure as we worked with the teachers to understand Sara's strengths, weakness and her charming idiosyncrasies. Many times she was punished for being who she is.

I have been surprised by some discoveries I have inadvertently made along the way, including uncovering information concerning availability of waiver support programs, need for legal guardianship and the role of vocational rehab. None of this information was forthcoming in any of the myriad of meetings I attended. I always said that I simply did not know the questions to ask.

My hope now is that school systems across the country that are now more well versed on the education of children challenged with autism, have this information readily available for all incoming parents who are new to the system.

Because of the uniqueness of each child's challenge it would be unfair to expound on Sara's experiences with the medical and social service fields. Suffice it to say that after obtaining the appropriate information, taking appropriate action for successful transition into adulthood will be as individual as your own child.

After much research, networking within the community, and trial and error, Sara is now comfortable working at a local sheltered workshop. It's been an interesting journey to establish suitable activities beyond school and work. Sara enjoys her involvement in the local theatrical group "The Jesters," and Bible study through a wonderful organization called Lutheran Disability Outreach. And she continues to meet new people and learn new skills in the classroom of life.

Though at times it felt as if we would never surmount the academic, social and medical obstacles before us when she was young, time has moved on and growth and change have miraculously occurred. I know my daughter's journey with autism is ongoing, as is my own as her mother. But we remain undaunted in the face of challenge.

There is not enough space here to provide the details needed to cover all that I have learned about parenting an adult child, autism, employment opportunities, and the system, as my daughter transitioned from high school to adulthood. And if I remember correctly, as a parent of a young child, one can only take in so much information. So I humbly offer these five touchstones for the reader's perusal.

Here's what I've learned:

- Be persistent in seeking and acquiring knowledgeable, compassionate and willing team members to work with your child, including regular and special education teachers, speech, occupational and physical therapists, vision specialist, neurologists, counselors, autism or behavioral consultants, supervisors, parents and others. Take the time to keep them all in the loop. Don't be afraid to replace those who are inadequate.
- Be willing to educate your child's teachers/classmates, or supervisors/workmates as to his/her challenges and strengths and how to respond to them. Be available to answer questions if needed.
- Investigate the waiver system and local service providers for additional assistance with respite and support.
- Take legal action to insure guardianship before your child reaches age 18. [continued top of page 7](#)

- Investigate the Vocational Rehabilitation system before your child graduates from high school. Know your rights and options for employment assistance.

One last word on transitioning — continue to be willing to be your child's unwavering, well-educated advocate with all teachers, doctors and other professionals he/she works with. You know your child best. There is help, hope and a future. Just believe.

Agencies and programs of interest

State Medical Assistance Program 800-452-4800 or 800-MEDICARE

Social Security Office 260-747-6072, 800-772-1213 or visit www.socialsecurity.gov

Allen County Division of Family Resources, 260-458-6445

Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, 800-403-0864

Indiana Rehabilitation Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, 260-424-1595

Easter Seals ARC of Northeast Indiana, Inc. 260-456-4534

Anthony Wayne Services (AWS), 260-482-4351

Your Friends and Neighbors, 260-436-9438

Lutheran Disability Outreach, Brian Pratt, 260-969-3342 or bypratt@lssin.org

The Jesters, Allison Ballard, allis2b@yahoo.com

You know your child best. There is help, hope and a future. Just believe.

Preparation begins at home and as early as 14 years of age.

Continued AWS article from page 4

Early preparation facilitates later transitions

So how does one begin preparing for a job? Preparation begins at home and as early as 14 years of age. Because the work environment is ever changing, there are many things parents can introduce at home to prepare their child for employment. Specific activities to help transition and acclimate their child to the world of work include:

- Building the expectations of work by introducing your child to different environments and people to learn to be flexible.
- Allowing your child to be as active as possible at school, at home and in the community to develop social skills and establish interpersonal relationships.
- Creating jobs at home to teach responsibility but mix them up so your child learns to adapt to change.
- Seeking out volunteer opportunities, which is helpful for identifying and developing particular skills and interests.

Being sure that your child is moving forward on IEP goals through measurable progress and outcomes.

While parents are working on transition-oriented activities, they should contact the Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Office about waivers and Vocational Rehabilitation, and apply for social security benefits. A Vocational Rehabilitation counselor must refer persons for services; the person can then choose a service provider. Throughout the transition process, there may be many more "what's next?" questions. Our goal is to make "what's next?" a question leading to increasing success in the workplace.

For more information on AWS Employment Services, please visit www.awsusa.com.

Continued ARC article from page 5

The opening statement reveals some subtle perspectives rarely thought of. The lemons are the life we are dealt, but it took initiative to find the right tools to transform the fruit, determination to see the task to the end, and finally enjoyment to reap the sweet reward of the final project...cool, refreshing lemonade!

Our gratefulness and heartfelt thanks go to our Lord for bringing Leah and Easter Seals to us, to Leah for coaching our son and seeing him through and to Dale and Terri Haines, owners of DLH Mechanical, for giving our son the chance to learn skills we were afraid to dream he could achieve."

Continued TPNEI from page 1

In addition to these lectures, there is an annual Transition Fair with service providers and advocates available to discuss services and share information about what to expect next in life after high school. Last year's fair was the 15th annual, held at IPFW and was themed "Charting your course' Live, Play, Learn and Work." Panel discussions included what employers are looking for in an employee, dressing for success and going to College.

Want to know more? Contact Randy Wolf 478-7817 ext. 19

randyw@fwgoodwill.org, or
Renee Dunifon 458-7120
rdunifon@workonene.org

Continued Voc Rehab from page 1

Second, parents need to make sure that the testing provided by their school for their child is age appropriate and disability appropriate. Make sure that you request retesting at the sophomore year of school as VR cannot use test data that is more than three years old. Parents need to keep a paper trail. Keep all testing from your school. Make sure even if you are not having significant medical problems, that you are visiting doctors on a regular basis and keep that paper trail as well.

Third, parents need to remember if the school has purchased items for the child, those items are school property. VR can help with supplemental services such as assistive technology, home and vehicle modifications, driver's training, therapies, tutors, personal aides, and physically restorative equipment.

If you want to learn more about Vocational Rehabilitation Services call 260-424-1595



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2009 events

Saturday, May 16
 2009 **WALK TO TALK** at Lawton Park

June 15-19 2009 Autism Week at **Camp Red Cedar**

Saturday, October 17,
 2009 Auburn Autism Walk

Don't Miss Out!

In an effort to contain costs, future ACT newsletters will be distributed via e-mail.

If your email address changes, please notify us by visiting www.ACTpositive.org and click the join mailing list link and complete the information requested.



Ideas, suggestions, or input for the next newsletter?

www.ACTpositive.org



ACT is looking for volunteers to help keep our website up to date with information relevant to our community. If you are interested contact us at info@ACTpositive.org

2009 Walk to Talk Planning!!

We already have been busy planning the 2009 Walk to Talk taking place on Saturday, May 16. **WE NEED YOU TO MAKE THIS WALK A SUCCESS!!**

It is not too late to help out in a small way. Many hands make light work! Our next planning meeting will be February 12th at 7:00pm at the Starbucks on Coliseum across from Glenbrook Mall.

You can also contact us by phone at 609-7412 or by e-mail at info@ACTpositive.org



ACT Autism Community Together of Northeast Indiana

ACT's role is to engage and support individuals, families, medical professionals, therapists and educators on effective methods to improve the lives of individuals with Autism and their families in Northeast Indiana. By focusing on the front-line service providers and high-tech solutions, we will be able to build communities of providers and extend best practices for enhancing the lives of people with Autism. ACT's key programming consists of:

- Community Website
- Parent Mentor Network
- Summer Programming for Individuals with Autism
- Training Sponsorships for Area Professionals