



A Quarterly Newsletter Produced by the Rural Institute Transition Projects

In This Issue:

- Work Experiences and Paid Employment
- Making the Most of Each Work Experience
- Emerging Leader Perspective: How I Prepared for Life After School
- Tips for Job Coaches

## Work Experiences and Paid Employment: Proposing an organized progression of distinct experiences that lead to employment for youth with disabilities

Norciva Shumpert, Michael Callahan & Ellen Condon, Marc Gold and Associates/Employment For All

In discussing the importance and role of work experience for youth in transition from school to work, the school-based experiences of Marc Gold Associates indicate that we take a more deliberate and planned approach to work preparation and employment for youth with disabilities. We have distinguished among various types of work experiences and discussed where they best fit for youth in terms of: student age, their stage within the transition process, and the purpose of the experience. Shumpert suggests that in order to prepare youth to become contributing wage earners within their communities we need to go beyond offering a generic one-size-fits-all approach to work exposure and preparation. Instead, we need to identify and coordinate specific activities that:

- ◆ expose youth to work,
- ◆ build their repertoire of specific employment tasks and general work skills,
- ◆ offer students a variety of experiences that represent the local job market,
- ◆ provide specific information about students in regard to their interests, support needs, strongest skills, and most ideal working conditions, and
- ◆ offer an individualized progression of experiences that result in a paid job prior to or upon graduation that is well matched to a student in terms of their ideal employment conditions, interests, and contributions.

By ideal employment conditions we mean the features that need to be in place for the student to be at their best, most independent, and making the greatest contribution to the workplace. These features can include type of task, supports, time of day, environmental characteristics of a work site, flow of work or pace expected within the site, and length of shift; whatever is necessary for the student to succeed in a work environment. Interests relate to areas of the job market for which the student has intrinsic motivation and contributions are defined as specific skills the student has developed and wishes to offer to local employers.

The strategy is based on the premise that if each student is offered an individualized progression of experiences in an increasingly customized manner, additional information

(Continued on page 2)



## Resources

University of Montana's Rural Institutes Transition Project's Work Experience Guide: [http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/Articles/RIWorkExperience\\_Manual.pdf](http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/Articles/RIWorkExperience_Manual.pdf)

Handbook for Implementing a Comprehensive Work-Based Learning Program According to the Fair Labor Standards Act: <http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/flsa/default.asp>

TASH: <http://www.TASH.org>

Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE): <http://www.apse.org>

## Save the Date

Montana Association for Rehabilitation and Montana Youth Transitions Project

2009

Youth in Transition Conference

Butte, Oct. 7th-9th

Register at [www.cspd.net](http://www.cspd.net)

## Contact Information:

Ellen Condon  
[condon@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:condon@ruralinstitute.umt.edu)  
 Kim Brown  
[brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu)  
 Connie Lewis  
[cjlewis@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:cjlewis@ruralinstitute.umt.edu)  
 Jillian Jurica  
[jjurica@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:jjurica@ruralinstitute.umt.edu)

The Rural Institute  
 009 CHC, 634 Eddy  
 The University of Montana  
 Missoula, MT 59812

(406) 243-5467  
 (800) 732-0323 Toll Free  
 (406) 243-4730 Fax

### **Work Experiences and Paid Employment, cont.**

will be learned about their most necessary conditions, their strongest interests, and their most dependable skills. Each experience can then build upon the previous experience to teach new skills and confirm or learn additional information about the student until a clear picture emerges of who the student is in terms of how they can contribute, what they need for supports, and what they will do for work in their community upon graduation from high school.

A description of nine types of experiences that have been used in the MYTI Project (Mississippi Youth Transition Initiative) in Mississippi follows:

1. General Employment Information through classes, tours, and informal work performed at home
2. Volunteering/Service Learning
3. Job Shadowing
4. General Work Experience
5. Matched Work Experience
6. Customized Work Experience
7. Part-time Paid Job
8. Customized Job
9. Self-Employment Business Ownership

Various types of experiences offer different opportunities for youth. This is not a rigid sequential list that students must all go through or a set of accomplishments to prove themselves ready to move from one experience to the next. However, we would anticipate that increased customization and paid employment would occur later as part of a high school career preparation process.

#### **General Employment Information and Typical Employment Activities**

This aspect of work experience provides an appropriate starting point for students who are currently too young to enter into community workplaces. These activities can be maintained throughout the remainder of a student's school experience by referencing, encouraging, and supporting the subsequent activities. We encourage teachers and families to start early – at ten years of age or even sooner – with this aspect of work experience. Young students with disabilities need to hear that paid work is an expected lifestyle role and that it is never too early to begin to develop interests, skills, and a clear idea of their conditions for success. Teachers can incorporate this general information into an array of curricular subject areas, including units on Discovery. Discovery is a process used to get to know a student by gathering information about the student's interests, strengths, environments or activities where they are at their best, supports that are effective for them, and present levels of performance, through activities such as interviews and observations. Schools can also use a variety of workplace tours and presentations by local employers to add realism and interest. It is important for schools to encourage students to research and participate in the array of home and neighborhood entrepreneurial activities many young people participate in (such as pet sitting, yard work, selling lemonade, etc.) to make spending money and to gain an early understanding of the responsibilities related to employment. Parents, school friends with disabilities, siblings, and students without disabilities should all be encouraged to partner with young persons to develop these opportunities. Finally, it is critically important to inform parents of the role of home-based chores in the development of a strong work ethic and to encourage them to work closely with school personnel to coordinate responsibilities with classroom information and Discovery.

**Volunteering/Service Learning** involves supporting students to participate in existing school and community service or volunteer efforts. Volunteering should start for students as young as ten (or even younger) and may continue throughout the school experience. These settings are where people without disabilities typically volunteer. Student outcomes for volunteering include participation/inclusion in community and school activities; learning to perform a variety of tasks and work responsibilities; and developing new skills. Outcomes for school staff include having a different context in which to observe student performance and assess learning styles, work behaviors, motivators, and skills.

**Job Shadowing** involves short-term observations of various types of job tasks and employment settings in the community. Job shadowing can start with students as young as ten years old and continue throughout the school experience, as needed. The time spent on shadowing experiences may range from an hour or two per experience for younger students to as much as two days per experience for older adolescents. Students should not perform work tasks during shadowing. The intended outcome for youth and school staff is to gather additional information about the type of work that is performed in specific employment settings and to provide students with a firsthand look at an employment location to determine if this is really what they want to pursue for employment.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Work Experiences and Paid Employment, cont.

**General Work Experiences** involve having students perform specific job duties in school and in workplaces in the community without pay. These experiences start at about age 14 and may continue until 16, or older as needed. General work experiences give students a broad sense of the types of employment in their community.

General work experiences expose students to a variety of settings and tasks, enable them to gather information about their interests and preferred working conditions, and help them build a list of tasks that they have experience performing. School personnel are able to observe students in a variety of settings and gather information about what features work and don't work for each student and then begin to foster some theories of the ideal working conditions for each student.

**Matched Work Experiences** refer to unpaid work experiences in community workplaces that are matched to the student's interests regarding employment as determined through the more general experiences. These matched experiences serve to clarify and affirm interests, test the theories about the work conditions necessary for success for that particular student, and provide an opportunity for specific skill and task development in their interest area.

**Customized Work Experiences** refer to unpaid work experiences in community workplaces that are matched in terms of the student's interests and for which either the conditions for success or the tasks offered to the employer are negotiated. These experiences are suitable for older students for whom additional information is needed prior to paid employment. For example, if from previous experiences we have developed a clear list of discreet tasks and skills a student has to offer an employer, but we aren't clear yet on all of the conditions for success, a customized experience is appropriate. The customized experience is also appropriate when we are clear on the conditions needed for success but want to expand the list of the tasks the student can offer an employer. Due to the time involved in planning for and negotiating a customized experience, if we have no questions left to answer, time might be better spent negotiating a paid position. (Another instance where customized experiences are appropriate is

for younger students who need a level of customization in order to participate in a general work experience due to the impact of their disability.)

**Part-Time Jobs** involve assisting and encouraging students to obtain short-term, part-time employment paid by an employer. The jobs may be matched to student interests or used to assist in clarifying interests and general work behaviors. Ideally these jobs will be after school or during the summer so they don't interfere with the student's opportunities to benefit from inclusion in their school. Part-time jobs are appropriate for students of employable age who have the skills to meet general expectations of employers without negotiation.

**Customized Employment** refers to paid employment that is matched **and** negotiated to meet the student's conditions for success, their interests and their

specific contributions as determined by Discovery, prior work experiences, and a customized plan. Customized jobs may be short-term and part-time in nature for younger students of employable age. A "transition job," meaning a job that the student transitions into as they leave school, should be developed prior to graduation using customized strategies. As students reach 18, customized jobs may be performed during school hours.

**Self-Employment** refers to a set of experiences and small business development activities that teachers can offer to students. The flow mirrors the experiences for wage employment above, evolving from a more generic experience to a more

individualized experience as the student's ideal conditions for employment become clearer, and the student gets closer to high school graduation. Regardless, self-employment relates to a business owned by the student or small group of students, not by the school. Business types should reflect those typically engaged in by young people as well as the student's interests.

For example, using self-employment for a general work experience might mean that a student develops a business of buying microwave popcorn by the case, redistributing it into individual size portions and selling them to teachers and other students. This would be a short-term activity to provide the student with the experience of self-employment, to determine their interests and to expand the

*(Continued on page 4)*

### Summer Jobs

Did you know that only 15% of youth with significant disabilities typically have summer jobs?

Research has found that youth who have worked in the summer are more likely to be employed after exiting high school. All youth with disabilities are more likely to have summer jobs if this is part of the IEP team's discussion around transition and you begin planning early in the year.

Visit [www.projectssummer.info](http://www.projectssummer.info) for more information about a project focusing on summer jobs for youth with disabilities in Wisconsin.

### **Work Experiences and Paid Employment, cont.**

list of tasks they can perform. To use self-employment as a customized transition job might include having the student purchase a popcorn cart and develop a business that they run at school events with the future plan of running the business in the community upon graduation.

### **A Word of Caution**

Work experiences have been used for years in the disability employment field in both schools and adult services. Too often, work experiences and volunteering have been used as a substitute for paid employment. While the timeframe of school provides an acceptable period for all youth to experience a variety of paid and unpaid experiences related to the direction of one's life employment, the caution that must be used in applying these strategies in adulthood cannot be overstated. In virtually every instance we recommend that services and systems that support adults with disabilities in the area of employment avoid the use of unpaid work experiences and long-term volunteer positions unless the person is already employed and the unpaid work is being used to explore new career directions. We feel that adulthood is the proper time for paid employment and that by using Discovery and Customized Employment, along with the variety of other options that result in paid relationships, regular employment is achievable for all. Of course, adults should be encouraged to volunteer *in addition* to paid employment in a manner similar to others who choose to support their communities.

### **Legal Requirements**

The [US Department of Labor provides clear guidelines](#) that describe the proper timeframes and focus of any work experience.

### **Other Considerations**

Schools that routinely use work experiences report that, once employers become used to having students in their businesses on a regular basis without paying them, employers are often reluctant to offer young people paid employment. Care should be taken in the development of unpaid work experiences to avoid long-term, open-ended relationships and to attempt to encourage participating employers to take the next step to paid employment.

### **Example of a Work Experience Evolution for a Student**

At age 12, Alex began volunteering as part of his middle school curriculum. He did short-term volunteer experiences at the food bank, the library, and the animal shelter. From these general experiences, school staff learned about his interest in dogs. In high school a matched, unpaid work experience was developed at a doggie day care walking, playing with, and feeding the dogs. The intended outcome of the matched experience was to expand the list of tasks that Alex could perform in an area that he was interested in, and to identify additional skills and competencies around dogs. The school also wanted to clarify information about the conditions that Alex needed on any job to be successful.

On Alex's first day as he was introduced to a new dog he dropped to his knees and presented his face within inches of the dog's face. The staff person walking the dog gasped and provided Alex with some instruction about how to introduce himself to unfamiliar dogs. Alex participated in the experience for a period of nine weeks (one school quarter). At the end of the experience the school staff did indeed confirm that dogs were a distinct interest area for him but had some questions about what additional tasks he could perform around dogs that might not require direct interaction with the dogs. The next experience was customized for him. The tasks of his job were negotiated and included entering pet license and vaccination information into a database at vet clinic and making individual dog identification tags. He also was responsible for photographing all new dogs that came to the vet's office and adding them to each owner's file. The condition of being around dogs without directly interacting with them was met as he performed all duties from behind the welcome counter.

As Alex got closer to graduation a new doggie day care opened in his town. His support team negotiated a paid customized job performing similar duties in the new business. Alex had lots of activity around dogs but wasn't responsible for directly handling dogs as part of his job. Additionally, Alex began taking a dog handling class with a coworker who had recently adopted a new dog.

### **Conclusion**

As we weave various work experience activities into a student's transition plan, we want to think about the purpose and outcome of each activity - what skills the student will learn within the experience; what information we will learn about the student through the experience; and how this particular experience fits within the overall activities or transition services that will prepare the student for his/her overall post-school goal of community employment.

(Continued on page 5)





**Work Experiences and Paid Employment, cont.**

**Work Experiences and Paid Employment Table**

Pages numbers for where to find information and forms in the [Work Experience Guide](#) are provided.

Age of Student	Type of Experience	Intended Outcome of Experience	How Information is Captured
Middle school to exit	Volunteering/ service learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student learns about jobs in his/ her community</li> <li>● Basic information on student preference and interests in relation to work</li> <li>● Start list of tasks student has experience with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Observation notes (pg. 46)</li> <li>● Summarize overall experience with the Work Experience Summary (pg. 48)</li> </ul>
Middle school; high school	Job shadowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student gathers more information about jobs in area of interest</li> <li>● Identify discreet tasks within interest area</li> <li>● Confirm/clarify interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student interview form</li> </ul>
Middle school; high school freshman	General work experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identify student interests</li> <li>● Form preliminary theories around conditions for employment</li> <li>● Expand task list</li> <li>● Learn about student's skills, contributions, strengths, and support needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Observation notes (pg. 46)</li> <li>● Work Experience Summary at culmination of experience (pg. 48)</li> </ul>
High school sophomore	Matched work experience (based on interest)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Expand the list of discreet tasks the student can perform in interest area</li> <li>● Clarify conditions needed for success in a workplace</li> <li>● Learn about student's skills, contributions, strengths and support needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Observation notes (pg. 46)</li> <li>● Work Experience Summary at culmination of experience (pg. 48)</li> </ul>
When needed (if more information is needed before pursuing paid employment)	Customized work experience (wage employment or self-employment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Expand list of discreet tasks</li> <li>● Answer a question about a condition for success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Observation notes (pg. 46)</li> <li>● Work Experience Summary at culmination of experience (pg. 48)</li> </ul>
Employment age (14 in some states) until exit	Paid work experience or paid self-employment experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Part-time paid job</li> <li>● Expand task list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Observation notes (pg. 46)</li> <li>● Work Experience Summary at culmination of experience (pg. 48)</li> </ul>
Exit year of high school	Customized job or Customized self-employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Paid work experience if short term</li> <li>● Post-school outcome if this is the transition job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Observation notes (pg. 46)</li> <li>● Work Experience Summary at culmination of experience (pg. 48)</li> </ul>

\*\*\* Self-employment could also be considered as a job shadowing, general or matched work experience. Youth may choose self-employment over wage employment; it may be the prevalent type of employment in an individual's community or it may be the most effective way to meet the student's conditions for employment.

## Making the Most of Each Work Experience

By Ellen Condon, Rural Institute

The goal of education is to prepare students to live productive lives as adults. Many students with and without disabilities will participate in work experiences as part of their high school and post high school preparation for their transition to adult life. For students with disabilities, the quality and extent of these experiences can significantly shape what their lives as adults will look like in terms of working in the community.

Students who don't receive adequate experience and skill development may never access community employment or their paths to employment could take a very long time. Students who have learned quality work skills and behaviors, have worked independently, and can express what types of supports, accommodations and conditions they need in a workplace to be successful can leave school employed or well on their way to employment. Students who have had a paid job while in school are more likely to work as adults (Wehman, 2006).

The perception of each student's "readiness" to work will heavily influence what services they receive upon exiting high school, and how quickly, if at all, they will become employed in the community. For instance, when students are first referred to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), one evaluation question that is typically asked is, "Can this student work competitively with supports to find and initially learn their job, or do they need someone to provide ongoing supports for the length of the job?" If the student appears to need ongoing or long-term support or supported employment services in order to work, VR will refer them to a waiting list for longer-term supports, such as: Developmental Disabilities Community Supports or Developmental Disabilities Supported Employment Services, a PASS plan, or VR Extended Employment services. In some areas of Montana it may take quite awhile for services to become available.

However, if the student and their support team have a clear vision of what "conditions" in terms of supports, workplace environment, and tasks a student must have in order to be most successful and most independent on a job, their ongoing support needs might look more achievable...especially if a quality job match is made for them.

The focus of this newsletter is to emphasize the importance of quality work experiences and to encourage all of the partners (including families) in the student's transition preparation to make the most out of each opportunity to prepare our youth to graduate from school and go to work. It is not that we have to work harder; we just need to work smarter. Evaluate the work experiences you are providing for youth or that your child is receiving by asking your team these questions:

### **Are we clear about the purpose of particular experiences for this student?**

Is the purpose to expose the student to various types of jobs? To work on assessing or teaching specific workplace behaviors or skills? To build a diverse résumé for the student? To teach skills in a functional way to enable the student to more easily learn the academic concepts?

### **Are we teaching all the skills we can during each experience?**

Is the student responsible to determine what time he needs to leave school, go on break, and leave work to get back to school? Is he working independent of the job coach once he performs his tasks to the company standard? Is he learning to ask coworkers and supervisors when he needs information or clarification? Does he quality-check his own work? Each site will offer opportunities to teach unique skills and work behaviors (see the examples in the [Work Experience Guide](#), (p. 17-21, 30-31).

(Continued on page 7)

## Training Calendar

### Web Conferences

The audio portion of the Web conferences can be accessed from any telephone and the video portion from a computer with Internet access. There is no cost for any of the sessions.

**Youth Track** – designed for young people with disabilities, their families, and those who provide services to these youth and families. *All sessions take place from 1:00pm - 2:30 pm Mountain Time.*

Oct. 6 - Disability History

Dec. 1 - Transition and Personal Care Services

Feb. 2 - Adult DD Service Providers – Who are they and what do they do?

Apr. 6 - After Graduation – Ideas for Rich, Full Days

Jun. 1 - Creative Housing Options

Aug. 3 - Self-Awareness, Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination

Audio recordings of Youth Track conferences that have already taken place may be downloaded from the Rural Institute Transition Projects and PLUK Web sites: <http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition> or <http://www.pluk.mt.typepad.com/transition/>

### Take Our Survey

We value your opinion. To provide feedback to us about this newsletter and our other products, please take our quick online survey at:

<http://www.surveygizmo.com/s/58441/transition-projects-feedback>



## **Making the Most ....., cont.**

### **Are we learning information about the student through each experience?**

Are we learning what she likes and doesn't like in terms of job environments, tasks, and types of work? How she responds to direction, supervision, and feedback? What motivates her to work? What types of settings she performs best in? What supports or conditions enable her to work most independently? What her level of stamina is? Whether that level differs in different jobs?

### **How are we capturing what we learn about the student from each experience?**

Are we taking performance data as the student learns new tasks? Are job coaches jotting down narrative descriptions of "aha" moments or observations of things about student performance that strike them as unique? Are they taking notes about days a student performed exceptionally well or needed additional support? Are they documenting what they learned a student really needs to be successful so that it can be applied to the next experience?

Many times work behavior checklists are used to assess students. Students are graded on whether they follow directions, stay on task, meet production requirements, etc. While this information is helpful, I encourage you to gather more descriptive information. Describe the student's performance and supports provided when they spend more time than typical attending to a certain task. Capture what support strategies or environments help them independently move from one task to another. Document what supervisory or instruction strategies enable the student to perform her job correctly.

- Create a mechanism for support staff to collect information each day.
- Writing descriptively and objectively while observing will enable staff to see the student's performance from a different perspective. Try to collect descriptive information before drawing conclusions about what works, doesn't work, or what the student needs for supports. See the Observation Notes form in the [Work Experience Guide](#) on page 46.

### **Is the student learning about himself?**

During work experiences, a student can learn what he likes and doesn't like for types of jobs, work environments, and workplace cultures. This is also an optimal time for the student to learn what types of conditions enable him to excel at work. For example, does he do best with a very structured routine? Or does he like to learn different tasks each time? Is he pretty flexible with having a task interrupted to go assist a coworker or customer or will that disrupt his overall performance?

### **Are we taking time to debrief with the student about what works and what doesn't work for her and about how to explain her need for accommodations to employers, coworkers, or job coaches?**

We want to promote the student's ability to request accommodations, explain her impact of disability and screen out and select jobs where she will be more likely to succeed.

- Have students journal this information for themselves.
- Take the time to process with the youth what works and doesn't work for them and then support them to practice asking for needed accommodations.
- Practice with youth to weed out jobs that are more likely to work well for them. It isn't enough to only teach interview skills and how to complete an application. There are many students who can get their own jobs but who lose those jobs frequently because they are choosing employment situations that don't match their ideal conditions.

### **Descriptive Writing Tips**

When taking observation notes think about writing what you see - just the facts. Do not draw conclusions or write judgmentally about the performance or behavior.

- Describe the action and performance with enough detail and robustness so any reader who was not there can picture it in their mind.
- Capture information that will indicate the motivation of the individual, and quality of their performance in terms of pace, correctness, and stamina.
- List specific tasks you see them doing, mundane household tasks, or tasks in school as well as vocational tasks.
- Describe any connections to people, organizations, and community that you become aware of the job seeker having.
- If any concerns arise from parents, the job seeker or support staff, note them. Quotes work well in this instance.

Observe and document first-summarize later. It will lead to a more objective conclusion and enable you to see a broader perspective of student performance.

*(Continued on page 8)*

## ***Making the Most ....., cont.***

**For a student who has ongoing support needs and whose disability poses a significant barrier to employment, are we identifying the conditions that enable this youth to participate maximally?**

It isn't adequate to say a young person needs ongoing support or a job coach all the time to be able to work. Instead, if we can define their support needs descriptively we can be more creative about how to meet those needs. Just as critical to identify are strategies and environmental conditions that enable the student to contribute the most and participate as independently or interdependently as possible.

- For students who need customization in order to participate in a work experience we need to provide it. Challenge your program to provide quality work experiences to everyone.
- Instead of stating that the student needs 1:1 support to participate, describe the support needed: "Kyle needs someone to assist with the physical aspects of this task that he can't do such as holding papers to be stapled. He also needs someone to program his technology so his switch is connected to the appliance he needs to activate." "Josh needs a predictable flow of tasks within the work environment for him to independently move from one task to the next. A written list of duties that he checks off after he finishes them also helps him move to the next task without someone reminding him."

**Are we capturing the information that we learn about the student through each work experience in a manner that can be shared with future support people?**

While students are in high school, school staff becomes familiar with how best to support them and how far they have come over the years. As they transition to an adult system of supports and all new providers, this information needs to be shared. This prevents the new support staff from having to rediscover it, and the student is not set up for failure or underachievement.

- Capture student performance through photos or videos of them at various sites performing various tasks.
- Keep a growing list of tasks a student has performed, skills they have demonstrated, and support strategies that have worked well. This is a great student activity. See sample portfolios on the [Representational Portfolio webpage](#) on the Transition Projects website.
- Write observation notes as well as completing performance checklists, (see the [Work Experience Guide](#) page 46). In addition to listing where the student worked and what tasks the student performed, summarize what was learned about the student from the overall experience (see the [Work Experience Guide](#) page 48).

Students with disabilities have a limited time when they are entitled to services. In most states entitlement ends once they graduate from school. Adult services are based on availability and eligibility, meaning that even if you are eligible for the service you might need to wait to receive it. For youth to be most successful as they exit school, we need to maximize what they receive for instruction, experience, and preparation for life... including real work in the community. In understanding what youth need in terms of ongoing supports, youth and families can be more creative in how they provide the individual's supports while they wait for more formal supports to become available. Also in understanding what types of tasks and work environments best meet a student's needs, a better job match can be made, thereby reducing the extent of the ongoing support that will have to be provided.

Wehman, P. 2006. *Life beyond the classroom; Transition strategies for young people with disabilities*. Fourth Edition, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co: Baltimore, MD.







## Emerging Leader Perspective: How I Prepared for Life After School

By Maclaen Burningham

My Name is Maclaen Burningham and I live in Polson, MT. I am a new member of the MT-TIRC advisory board. I graduated from Polson High in 2002 and have had several part-time paid jobs in the community since then. I work at Safeway and the Polson City Library and do other seasonal jobs in Polson as they are available. In this article I am going to tell you about how my work experiences prepared me for life after school.

I had a lot of work experiences while I was in high school. At St. Joseph's Assisted Living I folded laundry, I vacuumed, and I organized silverware eating utensils. I worked at two different video stores, Main Sail and Top 40 Video. I checked in movies, rewound them, and put them away. At Top 40 Video I cleaned glass on the front door and the shelves and I picked up garbage outside. Sometimes I also cashiered. This was my first paid job while I was still a student. I worked Friday nights. At the courthouse I was a secretary for the Superintendent of Schools. At the library I shelved paperbacks, kids' books, and free magazines, sharpened pencils, cut pieces of scratch paper, and weeded in their garden. At school I picked up garbage out in the parking lot. At Odyssey Auto glass I would vacuum out cars and help babysit their son "Gunner."

At St. Joseph's I learned to work a little slower than normal because I was working with elderly people. I had to vacuum the halls to keep the home clean for the elderly and go super slow so I would not run over anybody. I also had to learn to wrap up the vacuum cord and put it away. I had to sort knives, spoons and forks separately and have each one rolled up so it would be ready for them to eat their meals and make sure everything was clean so they would not get sick. I folded towels and different linens and put them away in a closet and separated dirty ones so they could be washed. Everyone was my friend and wanted to talk to me there and I had a friend that had a dog that I would visit and talk to before my work started and after. I also had a friend, Fritz, that would "coo coo" like a chicken. On Fridays we would have a special treat with my job coach. Sometimes people brought gifts for me. At the Top 40 Video Store I had a special job coach, Nanette Lockwood. We would hang out and do different things and problem solve when things went wrong and she helped me learn how to communicate with my boss when things were not working out correctly. One example of that was putting movies in alphabetical order by title. When a title started with "A" or "The" I thought I should use that first letter to alphabetize. The store didn't do it that way which was confusing for me.

My job coach was like my best friend and was like a mom to me next to my real mom.

At the courthouse I had to learn how to write down names, messages and phone numbers correctly when the superintendent or her secretary were gone so they could call back and I had to transfer calls back to the superintendent when there was a call. When it was slow I worked on my school work and sometimes ran errands.

At the library I shelved paperbacks and had to shelve them in the correct topic such as fiction, science fiction, romance, mystery and kids' books. I had to make sure they were in the right colored tapes so kids and staff could find them easily. It would be too hard to do in alphabetical order because kids will just stick it any where. I had to weed out and throw away magazines. I put out sharp pencils so people could write down information. I also cut scratch paper so people could have something to write down where to find a book or site on the internet or whatever they needed.

At school I had to pick up garbage after kids from going to lunch and littering so it would be nice outside and not go elsewhere. Kids should be respectful and not throw out garbage to show respect for students and adults. I did gardening and pulled weeds so the sidewalk would be clear and not full of grass and pick up garbage so it would look nice for the public and to show pride in our jobs together.

At Odyssey Auto Glass I would vacuum cars out and clean windows, shine up the cars, and picked up garbage so it would look nice for customers when they came back to pick up the car. I picked up mail and brought it back so they could pay their bills and was a secretary too. When the owners were gone I took messages on what jobs they had and who people were that wanted it done. I would watch Gunner and help babysit so he would not get run over or get hurt or lost or seriously injured.

At St. Joseph's I learned how to be a care taker for elderly people and how to keep them healthy and keep the place clean and a happy home for them. At the video stores I learned to be honest and put money in the till not my own pocket, to follow the bosses' instructions, to keep movies in correct categories for people to find, keep movies rewound so people could watch their show, return movies so people would not get fines, make sure it matched title and box,

*(Continued on page 10)*

### **Emerging Leader Perspective....., cont.**

and put them away in the correct spot alphabetically. I had two different bosses that had things they wanted done a certain way- differently. My bosses were both unique, very kind, caring and loving but it was hard when they told me different information.

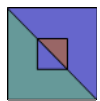
At school I learned how to work fast and how to manage my time spent picking up garbage when I got there and when I got done in the huge area around the school. I learned the importance of not eating other people's food or touching it so I would not get seriously sick from diseases. Last of all I learned to get my time card in on time so I would get paid. On all of my jobs I had to learn how to get better at my tasks and get more done, to work faster and how to learn many other different things as I got stuff down.

I loved all of my work experiences because I had different friends. I learned how to do different jobs so I could do more jobs and be depended on by an employer and be honest in all things and respectful to people. In my work I needed support of a job coach (at first) to teach me how to do my tasks, how to work with my employer at each job, and how to deal with customers and problems that came up. When my job coach faded out I knew how to work with my employer on my own and customers on my own and solve my problems. My job coach was there in case I needed help. Sometimes we would talk over problems on the phone.

Several of my work experiences turned into paid jobs after high school (Odyssey Auto Glass, Polson Library, the courthouse and the school) because I did an outstanding job and people helped me negotiate these jobs from the job experiences such as job coaches, my teacher Don Dubuque, and my mom and dad all working together.

My previous work and experiences helped me prepare for current jobs because I learned how to work as part of a team and remember the tasks I did and how to adapt to changes with people and with my job. This has led to me being independent, living in my own house, taking care of it, being able to communicate, and make friends on my own and be my own problem solver.

I want to share that you should believe in yourselves as a family and in yourself as a kid who has a disability and in your teachers. They are your guardians and your role models. Keep trying different things and solve your problems. Not everything works out or lasts forever; there will always be changes. There will be a job for everyone. Never say there is nothing for them to do because they are young - you have to adapt to their disabilities. Be patient...it takes time. Good luck in your travels and trials.



### **Tips for Job Coaches**

Make the experience as close to a real job as possible.

1. Complete a job analysis before starting a student at a job site to be clear about the job site expectations for work behavior and task performance, and to be clear about how each task is supposed to be performed. Watch someone from the job site perform the tasks.
2. Have the supervisor and coworkers provide as much training and support as they can rather than having the outside job coach provide this.
3. From the job analysis you should have a clear vision of how a task is to be performed and the criterion for completion. Set high standards for quality and performance. It is important to have a plan before you begin training the student. "Winging it" can lead to a frustrated student and sloppy performance.
4. For examples of job site analyses see the [Work Experience Guide](#) pages 15-21.

Have the student complete the entire task him/herself rather than doing pieces of it with them.

1. Co-working (having both the student and the job coach performing the job) isn't typical in most work sites.
2. It leads the student to think that he/she needs or will have someone with them all the time.

*(Tips continued on page 11)*

## Tips for Job Coaches, cont.

3. If you are working you can't be teaching and you will miss opportunities for instruction and to prevent incorrect performance.
4. If a student is having difficulty with one step of the task, rather than doing it FOR them see if you can teach them to do it on their own.
5. Or ask a coworker if other people are having difficulty with that step - if so, what do they do?
6. Before changing or adding anything into the task that isn't typical to the work environment, follow the method that the workplace uses to see if the student can learn to perform the task the natural way.

To evaluate if the student is ready to have your supports faded, ask yourself, "What does this student rely on me to provide that they need to be able to do for themselves?"

1. Make sure that you are not providing supports and encouraging dependence out of habit rather than based on need.
2. Teach the needed skill, or come up with an alternative performance strategy for the student to be independent and self reliant.
3. Good job coaches are always looking at how the person can be competent and independent at their work tasks.
4. Are you teaching all the skills that you can (managing time, asking supervisors for direction, calling in sick, socializing, quality checking your own work...)?
5. Make sure the student is performing the task correctly and competently before you fade.

You are setting the example for people in the community about interacting with young adults with disabilities.

1. Treat the young person as an adult. Make sure your language, tone of voice, body language and assistance are reflective of interacting with an adult.
2. If you need to give the student information, correction or assistance, be discreet - remember that you are in a public work environment.

Avoid constantly reinforcing the student with "good jobs" or high fives or acting as their cheerleader. This isn't typical feedback within community work settings and the student may become dependent on this level of support and feedback, making it harder for you to fade.

Teach the employee to determine when the task is done, what to do next and when it is correct themselves rather than having them depend on you to make those decisions.

As you teach, focus on providing information...be succinct and to the point. Avoid creating "white noise" or becoming a distraction to the student by talking too much.

This publication was produced by the University of Montana's Rural Institute Transition Projects *Partnerships for Transition*, which is funded under a contract with the Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities, and MT-TIRC #90DN0223/01 awarded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Developmental Disabilities. The statements herein do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the funding agencies. Formatting provided by Jillian Jurica.

**The Rural Institute:**  
Center for Excellence in Disability  
Education, Research, and Service  
009 CHC, 634 Eddy  
University of Montana  
Missoula, MT 59812  
Telephone: (406) 243-5467  
TT: (406) 243-4200  
Toll Free: (800) 732-0323  
Fax: (406) 243-4730

<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition>

To receive this newsletter, join the  
Montana Transition Listserv by  
emailing Kim Brown at:  
[brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu)

