



Providing support and information for families of children with disabilities, chronic illness and other special health care needs

How-to for Creating Work Opportunities

Texas Parent to Parent

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A common fear for parents as their child becomes a young adult is that he or she will sit at home all day after graduation and do nothing. They wonder, how do I assist my child to have a full, meaningful day? A primary answer for these concerns is WORK!

From *A Good Life*, by Al Etmanski, comes the idea that everyone must work, regardless of the disability. Work in this book is defined as making a contribution, and everyone deserves the opportunity to make a contribution to his or her community, to use his talents and follow her passion. Work has many benefits as well: work gives meaning to our lives and a reason to get up and get going every day, provides a routine and a schedule, connects us with people, makes us feel useful, and earns money!

We usually think of work as the 8-5 job we've been doing for years, but that model may not work for your child. We will expand the concept of work to include volunteering, working part-time, and entrepreneurship or self-employment; a person's work can range from 1 to 40 hours a week or more. Remember, our definition of work is making a contribution, and all of these forms of work fit that definition.

But how do you get started? What can help your child learn about work and find the right path? To get started we must give our children work experience and call on all our resources at home, at school, and in the community to create work opportunities.

Encourage your child to gain work experience at home and in the neighborhood

Assess your child's interests, skills and strengths and then look for tasks around the house and neighborhood that match these interests and skills. Encourage him or her to do them regularly, tasks such as yard work, pet care, picking up mail and papers while the neighbors are out of town, watering plants, babysitting, running errands--anything that promotes your child's sense that work is important and gives him work experience. Consider your elder neighbors--they may need someone to help with their electronic gadgets, run errands, cook some meals, or provide companionship. Likewise your busiest neighbors may be eager to pay someone to walk the dog, water the plants, or do their grocery shopping. Whatever the task, it's important to keep a log—see what your child can do, what help is needed, and what makes him or her happy and engaged.

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Use school to gain work skills and experience

Some of the ways that school can help your child gain work skills and experience are:

- Classes to develop work skills based on the student's interests and strengths, resume writing, good work habits, etc
- Internships to gain work experience (usually un-paid), first on campus and then off campus (Community-Based Vocational Instruction or CBVI)
- Off-campus paid employment in the last years of school. A school VAC (Vocational Adjustment Counselor) or a supported employment coach can help your child find a job and provide job coaching as your child learns the skills to do a job.

Ask school staff to sit down with you and your child (not at an ARD!) to brain-storm about work options for your child. Some new ideas might be translated into IEP goals. Here are some questions to ask at a brain-storming meeting:

- What are your child's interests, strengths and abilities?
- What does she love to do? What are his likes and dislikes? What motivates her? What does he get excited about?
- Does your child like a quiet environment or does she thrive in a noisy, active environment? Does he like to be inside or outside? Consider what kind of environment will work best for your child.
- What supports does she need to work?
- What work opportunities are available near home or on a bus line? Is transportation needed and who can supply it?

Find a supportive work environment

- Look for a place for your child to gain work experience or to find a job where people are accepting and will treat your child as an equal member of their team. Consider schools, churches, a seminary, or a non-profit or service agency that supports people with disabilities.
- Look for a place that is already diverse. Notice the grocery stores, hardware stores, hotels, restaurants, pharmacies where people with disabilities already work. Their presence shows a willingness to hire and adapt the work-place to suit the person. On the other hand, don't be limited to places that already hire people with disabilities; consider all options that afford your child the opportunity to use his skills and follow his interests.
- Sometimes, instead of a small caring place, you might find opportunities at a state agency or a big company that has a hiring requirement or policy to promote work for people with disabilities.
- Consider self-employment. Self-employment can be more flexible and creative and truly promote work geared to your child's energy level, interests and abilities.

Set a goal of finding paid employment in a competitive, integrated workplace

- Talk to friends and associates about what employment opportunities are available. Most people find employment through their networks and connections.
- Brainstorm about your child's abilities and interests.
- Develop a resume of your child's work experience, including school, summer and volunteer jobs.
- Access the internet for such things as interest and skill assessments, ADA policy, the kinds of jobs available in your area, and when and how to disclose a disability. (See last pages.)
- Make sure your child is gaining the skills to obtain employment, such as reading and technology skills, problem solving, communicating, following directions, and following a routine.
- Make sure your child is gaining the soft skills required by most employers: communicating what accommodations are needed, getting to work on time, asking for assistance when needed, meeting the dress requirements of a work site, and staying cheerful and positive.
- Get to know the employment resources in your area: funds for training and equipment, help with finding employment, and job coaching.
- Consider what natural supports are available in a work-place. Is there a commitment to support a person with a disability in the work-place?

Develop a group to help with the job search

- One way to keep the job search effort going is to create an employment network or support group to help carry out your child's job quest. It could be made up of school staff, friends, family, neighbors, business owners and anyone interested in this area.
- Do you know other parents who would like to team up to create a work collaborative? Perhaps a group could advertise together to provide yard work, computer repair, errand running, set-up for parties or church events. Such a group might make it easier on each parent and also provide supports and companionship for the group of workers.
- Who in the brain-storming group has community connections that can help your child get started with a job or pursue an interest? Who can help build a website to advertize your child's business, help with business cards, etc.?

Find long-term supports to keep your child working

Once your child has obtained a job, whether self-employed or at a work site, he or she may need short-term or long-term job coaching and supports. The first place to turn after graduation is Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) for assistance with finding a job, providing on-site job coaching and modifications, and paying for equipment and learning opportunities related to getting and keeping a job. DARS services will be short-term but can be accessed again if your child loses his or her job. A long-term employment plan may be necessary for the point when DARS services end. To learn more about DARS services, ask your child's school staff or check the DARS website. (See

last pages.)

Medicaid Waiver Programs and services for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities may provide job development and job coaching and supported employment services. Ask your service provider about assistance to find and keep a job. (See last pages.)

If your child is employed and needs to maintain eligibility for public funding (SSI, Medicaid, etc), PASS (Plan to Achieve Self-Support) can be set up to allow your child to save money for a work-related expense. You must identify a job or business, the steps you'll take to achieve your work goal (for example, education or training, transportation, childcare, or assistive technology), the money you'll need to pay for these things, and a timetable. (See last pages.)

It may seem overwhelming to plan for work opportunities for your child, but keep in mind that work after graduation will make a significant, positive difference in your child's everyday life. It can give your child a purpose, increase self-esteem, build relationships outside the family, increase skills, give a sense of achievement, and increase independence in the community. It can encourage growth and learning after school ends. It opens doors and provides a way for your child to express himself, follow her passion, and make a contribution. What could be more important?

Resource List

State and Federal Funding and Employment Services:

Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services

<http://www.dads.state.tx.us/services/listofservices.html#physical>

Intellectual and Developmental Disability Services

<http://www.dads.state.tx.us/services/contact.cfm>

Medicaid Waivers

<http://facilityquality.dads.state.tx.us/qrs/public/qrs.do?page=qrsHCBP1&serviceType=HCBP&lang=en&mode=P&dataSet=1&ctx=421054>

PASS <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-plans-self-support.htm>

Supplemental Security Income

<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/EN-05-11000.pdf>

Other agencies in Texas that can help with employment:

Easter Seals http://www.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=ntl_wfd_main

Goodwill Industries <http://locator.goodwill.org/>

Project Search <http://www.projectsearch.us/Home.aspx>

Resource Centers for Independent Living http://www.dars.state.tx.us/drs/directory_cil.shtml

Summer Youth Programs funded through city/county, search at your local level

Workforce Solution Centers Disability Navigators
<http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/disnav.html>

Look for employment information at these websites:

www.disabilityrightstx.org/resources/

www.jan.wvu.edu (ADA accommodations and more)

www.lifeafterieps.com/self-employment-resources-for-entrepreneurs-with-disabilities/

www.nichcy.org/publications/topics-az

www.pacer.org/publications/ncsetbriefs.asp

www.ncset.org/

www.thearcoftexas.org --> Services in Texas

www.transitionintexas.org

Texas Parent to Parent website on Pathways to Adulthood <http://txp2p.org/parents/pathway.html>

Specific employment topics

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD-Youth) <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/>

Dept Of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy – Soft Skills Resources
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/>

Job Accommodation Network – Best resource on Job Accommodations at work <http://askjan.org/>

“Preparing for Employment: On the Home Front” – Ideas on building work skills at home.
<http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=2844>

“Building a Resume: Tips for Youth with Disabilities”
<http://www.fastfamilysupport.org/fasttraining/FirstJob/English/FAST%20building%20a%20resume.pdf>

“My Action Plan” – Helps youth and parents with specific steps when exploring careers.
[http://www.fastfamilysupport.org/fasttraining/FirstJob/English/FAST-%20my%20action%20plan%20\(employment\).pdf](http://www.fastfamilysupport.org/fasttraining/FirstJob/English/FAST-%20my%20action%20plan%20(employment).pdf)

Here are 2 websites on developing an entrepreneurship or self-employment:
lifeafterieps.com/self-employment-resources-for-entrepreneurs-with-disabilities/
<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/Findpassion.asp>

A Good Life, by Al Etmanski <https://plan-31.myshopify.com/collections/books> or check at amazon.com to see if you can find a cheaper, used copy. The organization is at www.plan.ca