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*Working with and for people with developmental disabilities and their families in Wake County.*



## ADVOCATING FOR EFFECTIVE TRANSITION SERVICES FOR ALL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Transition services are to begin at age 14 for students with IEPs in the state of North Carolina. In years past the common mindset was focused primarily upon school to work. Today, the approach is much more encompassing as the terminology of school to adult life is more generally heard. Nevertheless, work is still very much in the forefront of both students and parents as the date of graduation comes closer and closer. What will my son or daughter do during the day instead of going to school? How will all of those hours be occupied and what will we do about transportation?

A well coordinated transition plan within high school will address these concerns. For students with developmental disabilities whom are able to complete the Occupational Course of Study diploma track, they will need to complete 240 hours of unpaid work and 360 hours of paid work experience. OCS was designed 6 years ago in order to provide an opportunity for many learning disabled students to pursue a diploma. The academic component requires 300 hours of study. The OCS program has Transition Training Facilitators provided by the school system in order to provide the proper support required in order to assist in meeting the paid work requirement. What happens with those students who have more involved disabilities who cannot meet the requirements of the OCS course of study but whom would benefit greatly from community based instruction within the area of supported employment? Are there any hopes or expectations to be included in the work force as contributing members of society?

Unlike the OCS students, individuals with developmental disabilities with greater support needs need to advocate through the IEP process in order to obtain supported employment experience prior to graduation. Schools are looking to utilize teaching assistants in the capacity of job coaches within the community. This model can prove to be successful. Students and families need to know that community based instruction in the area of employment can be requested and the identified transition need is to be met by the school system. Regardless of IQ and reading levels, students with significant disabilities can work out in the community within the correct position at the correct location based upon their own particular set of skills and strengths. Students should be flexible and be exposed to numerous employment opportunities that meet their interests, skills, and values.

Transportation always poses itself as an obstacle through the education system and into adulthood for individuals with developmental disabilities. Upon graduation from high school if a young adult has either a paid or volunteer position within the community it is his or her responsibility to get to and from work which is often done with help from family members. Work may be part-time and the hours may be difficult to accommodate. Thinking outside of the box, some families have reached out within their faith communities in order to get help with scheduling transportation. Another option that some families and individuals select is that of ADVP [Adult Vocational Day Program]. This is a holistic all day program that provides some contract work as an employment component but also incorporates recreation, self-advocacy, and compensatory education throughout the day. Some families feel pressured to make this choice because the program is provided five days a week and transportation is during predictable hours usually early morning before work and late afternoon. Despite the fact that supported employment within the community may be more apt at having the person reach his or her full potential, there are often other factors at work preventing such a positive outcome.