



A Quarterly Newsletter Produced by the Rural Institute Transition Projects

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Introduction to Partnerships for Transition

by Ellen Condon and Kim Brown

Partnerships for Transition is a collaborative venture between the Rural Institute's Transition Projects, the Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities (MCDD), and PLUK, Parents Let's Unite for Kids. This project, funded by the MCDD, is designed to improve transition outcomes for middle school youth with developmental disabilities.

Why is this important?

Research shows that students who have real paid work experience before they graduate from high school are more likely to be employed after graduation. There are many activities middle school students can participate in to prepare them to be successful in paid employment while they're in high school and to help them graduate with jobs. Also, important information can be learned during middle school about the student that will help guide Individualized Education Plan (IEP) development and what his or her school day might look like.

What kinds of things can middle school students do to help prepare themselves for transition?

- Discover their strengths, skills, interests, and strategies that help them learn and perform at their best

- Be able to share this information about themselves at their own IEP meetings using Transition Portfolios
- Work at school-based jobs
- Try out self-employment (pet sit, yard work, etc....)
- Perform volunteer work in the community
- Become familiar with and get connected to local resources that provide Adult Services.

How will the Partnerships for Transition Project help prepare middle school students and the people who live and work with them?

- By providing quarterly teleconference training about transition, employment, Social Security work incentives, and collaborative funding to PLUK Family Support Consultants, families, teachers, agency staff, and others who are interested.
- By developing a "tool kit" that communities may use to share information about transition needs and services with students, families, and schools.
- By piloting the transition forum tool kit in five Montana communities.

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Resources:

University of Montana's Rural Institute Transition Projects
<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/>

Parents, Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK)
<http://www.pluk.org/>

Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities
<http://www.mtcdd.org/>

Montana Developmental Disabilities Program
<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/ddp/index.shtml>

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Introduction..., cont.

- Through implementing a middle school student "Discovery" process with ten students with developmental disabilities (two each in Billings, Butte, Helena, and Miles City; one each in Kalispell and Missoula).
- Through mentoring local teams (PLUK Consultants, family members, teachers, etc.) to develop early employment experiences and transition plans for the ten students.

Discovery
A person-centered process that guides service providers and schools in getting to know a student in terms of interests, goals, abilities, support needs, and contributions for the purpose of planning for transition and eventually employment.

- Through coaching local teams to develop Transition Portfolios (using text and photos) to record the information learned about each of the ten students during "Discovery."
- By assisting teams to identify adult agencies that could support students after graduation and supporting their timely connections.
- By disseminating project information and updates through the Rural Institute Transition and PLUK Web sites, quarterly electronic newsletters, and articles in PLUK's newsletter.

Who Are We?

Getting to Know the Partnerships for Transition Team

The University of Montana Rural Institute (RI), Parents, Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK), and the Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities (MCDD) are collaborating to implement the 2006-2007 Partnerships for Transition Project. We would like to introduce you to our RI and PLUK team members, as well as to several of the awesome young people we have the privilege of getting to know and with whom we'll be working over the course of the project.

Theresa Baldry

Theresa began working for PLUK in 2001 and is the Family Support Consultant for eastern Montana. She and her family live in Miles City. She and her husband have six children ages 12-24 (five boys and one girl). Theresa first became aware of PLUK when it was suggested one of her middle sons, Isaac, might benefit from assistive technology 13 years ago. You can often find the family at one of the children's sporting events or following a local team. Having a child with special needs also starting the process of transition, Theresa feels the knowledge she gains from this project will assist her both personally and professionally. Knowledge is power.

Kim Brown


Kim started her human services career in 1982. She has worked at vocational programs and group homes for individuals with developmental disabilities and/or mental illnesses, a nursing home for the elderly and people with severe physical disabilities, and a psychiatric hospital for children. In 1990, Kim earned her BSW from Carroll College. She spent the next 11 years with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services in the public assistance arena. In 2001, Kim was hired by the Bitterroot Valley Education Cooperative to provide children's mental health services. To continue her journey of lifelong learning, she joined the University of Montana Rural Institute as a Transition Project Coordinator in July 2003. She currently serves as Project Coordinator for one grant and Project

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Upcoming Training

You may register for the teleconference session by contacting Kim Brown at least two weeks in advance by either email at: brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu or calling: (406) 243-4852

May

 5/14/07, 1:00-2:30,
Teleconference: "Post Secondary Education Planning for Middle School Students with Disabilities" -
Tentative 15 sites -
To Be Determined*

* If you are interested in hosting a teleconference site in your community, please contact Kim Brown at: brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu or by calling (406) 243-4852

Handouts, PowerPoints, and video streams from previous trainings can be found at the PLUK Video/Training Archive: <http://www.pluk.org/ITVarchive>
Past topics include:

- Discovery and Transition Planning
- Creating Transition Portfolios
- Transition Planning for Middle Students with Disabilities, and
- Partnerships for Transition



Who Are We?, cont.

Co-Director of the Partnerships for Transition Project. Brown lectures nationally on transition and customized employment, teaches an undergraduate level social welfare policy class, and is also completing her Master of Social Work degree through the U of M.

Ellen Condon

Ellen has been working at the Rural Institute since 1996 and is now the Transition Projects Director. She has served as the Principle Investigator and Director of two U.S. Department of Education Model Demonstration Projects, and the Principle Investigator and Director of five Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities funded projects. Condon also works as a consultant for Marc Gold and Associates and is on the Board of Directors for Employment For All. Her current work focuses on Customized Employment; Transition to Employment for students with significant disabilities; promoting Social Security work incentives as a component of transition planning and an avenue to encourage consumer choice and control; and the development of an Individualized Model of Career Planning for students which promotes customized career exploration and employment, blending of resources and the development of alternative resources such as work incentives. Condon has worked in the disability field for over 20 years in community employment, school and residential settings.

Mary Hall

Mary is the Missoula-based PLUK Family Support Consultant and the parent of an adolescent with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Because of her experiences as the parent of a child with challenging and complex needs, and in an attempt to finally understand the Special Education system, she completed her MA in School Psychology at UM in 2003 and is a licensed school psychologist. Much to her surprise, she finds that she still does not know everything about Special Education, but she believes she is too old to earn her PhD.

Melissa Ann Hansen

Melissa has been working as the Butte-based Family Support Consultant for PLUK since September 2005. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Work and Criminal Justice from Weber State University in 1994, and has been working in the field of disabilities since 1990. Melissa is a State of Montana Certified Family Support Specialist, and the Founding Director of Same Difference Inclusive Theatre Company.

Stephanie Luehr

Stephanie has been a Family Support Consultant with PLUK for five years. She is based in Kalispell. Besides Stephanie's direct work with families, she is a registered trainer with the State and a member of the State Children's Mental Health System of Care. Stephanie and two of her five children have coped with their own disabilities, which has fostered her love for working with children and their families to help promote positive advocacy skills.

Diana Tavary

Diana began her advocacy work in March of 1993, when her 19-month-old daughter McKenzie was diagnosed with Autism, Cognitive Delay, and a severe seizure disorder. A local agency that serves children with disabilities (Family Outreach) sent Diana to a training session for parents. After spending several weeks in Billings with PLUK, she graduated from "boot camp" and was ready to take on the world of advocacy work. Diana served on regional boards and then was on to the Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities. From there her desires took her to the board of directors for the Montana Advocacy Program. In December 2005, she was added to the PLUK staff to serve the Helena area. Diana is currently serving on two committees with the State, the Governor's Rates Restructure and Department of Developmental Disabilities Rate Restructure for Children. The Helena School District has invited Diana to participate on an autism focus group, which provides many avenues for collaboration with school administrators, teachers and directors. Diana owns two businesses, but of all the things that she does, advocating for the civil rights of people with disabilities is at the top of her list.

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Who Are We?, cont.

Sandy Taylor

Sandy is a PLUK Family Support Consultant based in Billings. She's worked in this capacity for four years. Sandy is also a companion/rehabilitation aide for a middle-aged woman who has a traumatic brain injury. Prior to joining PLUK, Sandy spent ten years in the education field working as both a teacher and a school counselor. She earned her BSED in Elementary Teaching from Eastern Montana College and her MSED in School Counseling from MSU-Billings. Sandy was born and raised in Billings, Montana, with her nine brothers and sisters. She has also lived in Idaho and Colorado.

Meet the Students

A Brief Introduction to Five of Our Young Partners

(Thank you to the students' parents for providing this information!)

ALEX

Alex is 13 years old. He enjoys movies (Disney is always his first choice), computer and video games, swimming, and 4-H archery. Alex was diagnosed with autism at 2½, and has been served by the Children's Developmental Center (CDC) ever since. A wonderful partnership between his family, CDC and the school district has helped him achieve terrific, and initially out-of-reach, goals such as walking to school alone, acing spelling class without any special education supports, competing in archery, and finding and buying his own music on iTunes! Outside of PLUK and the RI, his formal team for this project consists of his parents, 14-year-old sister, 6th grade teacher, Family Support Specialist from CDC, habilitation aide and personal care attendant, and the head of Special Services for the local schools.

ANDERS

Anders is in the 8th grade. He has been integrated into regular education classrooms most of his academic life - we chose his current school because there are not enough kids with special needs for the school to have a self-contained classroom. Anders is highly imitative and we want him around normally developing peer role models as much as possible so he can develop the social skills we feel will be essential in order for him to integrate into society as an adult. He will begin the

transition process to high school this month. Other than the school resource room staff and Anders' medical staff, we are not served by any other disability services. We used to tie in with parents of other children with Down syndrome, as well as Eagle Mount, an adaptive recreation program that was in our community for a few years. They were very helpful in teaching Anders to ski. We also recently have connected with PLUK for the Partnerships for Transition Project. We hope this will help us identify strengths we can build on when choosing high school classes, steer Anders toward appropriate jobs, and provide us with information about community resources available once Anders exits high school.

CATHERINE

Catherine is a 15-year-old girl in the 8th grade. She has a wonderful imagination, which she uses to create her own take on popular video stories. Catherine loves animals, especially dogs and horses.

DALTON

Dalton is a 13-year-old boy in the 6th grade. He aspires to attend college. Dalton is very interested in model railroading.

TAYLOR

Taylor is an energetic 7th grader in a special education class. His interests include sports, Special Olympics, video games, and playing with his dogs. Taylor's strengths are his great sense of humor, compassion for others, and patience.



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