



A Quarterly Newsletter Produced by the Rural Institute Transition Projects

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## Representational Portfolios for Middle School Students

By Ellen Condon, Michael Callahan, and Kim Brown

### Portfolio Background

The Presentation Portfolio was developed by Michael Callahan (Callahan & Garner, 1997) for United Cerebral Palsy and Marc Gold and Associates through a NIDRR-funded grant (#133680030). It was designed as a job development tool for job seekers who had difficulty competing for jobs through traditional application processes and the labor-market-driven approach to employment (Mast, Sweeney, & West, 2001). The Portfolio offers a strategy to represent a job seeker and illustrate their skills, strengths and potential contributions to prospective employers through narrative and pictorial information instead of through a job application or written résumé. This format serves as a visual resume that is especially useful for students with little or no work history and as a substitute for written résumés. It is intended to be used as a component of a customized approach to employment, which begins with an in-depth look at who the job seeker is for the purpose of custom tailoring employment to that individual. Used in isolation of this process, the Portfolio still has value but will lack the impact and power of serving as a tool for negotiating supports, accommodations and a customized position on behalf of the job seeker.

Images in the Portfolio communicate information about how the job seeker

performs work and other activities; their skills and abilities; accommodations and/or supports that are effective for them; interests; and any additional information or experiences which could be of value to employers. Through pictures of the individual, the Portfolio shares information about the impact of her or his disability in a way that can facilitate conversations about what is needed for accommodations, supports, or other customization.

Over the course of the Portfolio project (1998-2001), a model template was developed and piloted nationally with 250 employers. Feedback collected from these employers was overwhelmingly positive. They stated that the Portfolio photos enabled them to see the work capabilities of people with disabilities and that the tool concretely described what people needed in terms of work support (Mast et al, 2001). The Montana experience using this strategy has been that employers are better able to envision the individual within their own businesses and conceptualize the tasks that the job seeker could perform for them (Condon, in conversation) which supports the findings stated by Mast, Sweeney, & West in 2001.

The success of the Portfolio as a job development tool for people

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## Resources

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

UM Transition Projects Portfolio Pages  
<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/portfolio.asp>

UM Transition Projects Portfolio Planning Tool  
[http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/form\\_portplan.asp](http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/form_portplan.asp)

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

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

### Authors' Contact Information:

Ellen Condon  
[condon@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:condon@ruralinstitute.umt.edu)  
Kim Brown  
[brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:brown@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

Michael Callahan  
[mcallahan@aol.com](mailto:mcallahan@aol.com)  
(228) 497-6999

## Representational Portfolios..., cont.

with a significant impact of disability confirms that how we represent people to employers impacts whether or not they will be hired. Similarly, the authors believe this concept can be generalized when using the Portfolio tool in other situations. If we can represent youth with disabilities through positive imagery and information to new school and support staff, the picture of a competent, contributing student can lead to greater opportunities and access to inclusive community work experiences. Additionally, by illustrating supports, accommodations, and conditions of environments that enable the youth to participate maximally, school and vocational staff will have the knowledge to customize work experiences for students who need this level of individualization.

### Using Portfolios with Middle School Students

In 2006, the Rural Institute Transition Projects at the University of Montana began piloting this tool for use with middle school students ages 12-15 in the Partnerships for Transition Project funded by the Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities. Instead of using the Portfolio for the purpose of job development, students and/or their families use the Portfolio to represent themselves or their child at Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, and in introductions to new teachers and support staff. The tool is especially effective in sharing information as a student transitions from middle school to high school.

IEP team members may have very different perceptions of the student based on the limited contexts in which they interact with them. Because the Portfolio contains information about when each student is "at their best" or "most who they are," it enables families and youth to share information about activities, interests, skills, experiences, and effective support strategies to provide a more complete, well-rounded picture of the youth.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 directs transition planning to prepare youth with disabilities

for rich, full lives after graduation from high school including: employment, community participation, education, training, and independent living. It is critical for the IEP team to have a comprehensive picture of the student across all life environments, not just within the school building or engaged in school activities. If we are to get a clear picture of who youth are and where and when they are most likely to be at their best, it is essential that information from home be brought to the planning table.

### Contents of the Portfolio

The Representational Portfolio differs from other types of portfolios used in schools – school portfolios typically consist of a historical compilation of information for a student. This Portfolio is a picture of who the student is at this point in time.

Each student's Portfolio contains information unique to them, but the general format we have followed to date includes information about the student from home, the community, school, and any other important places. Pictures and descriptions from home might consist of: activities that the student enjoys in their free time, what responsibilities and chores they have, and supports the family provides to encourage their child to participate as fully as possible. Community information and photos could include any activities in which the student participates (school clubs or teams, church groups, local organizations, neighborhood events, recreational pursuits, etc.) and connections or friends, or even places they like to frequent (shopping malls, videogame arcades, skateboard parks, etc.). Any volunteer opportunities, work experiences, or paid jobs within the school, home, or community should be documented in the Portfolio as well. Finally, the Portfolio needs text and pictures to demonstrate how best to support each student.

If they use assistive technology, the Portfolio

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Resources

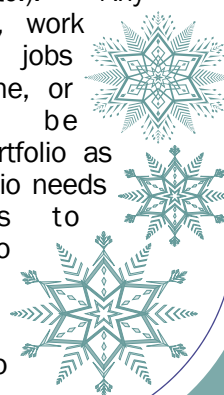
Administration on Developmental Disabilities Youth Information, Training and Resource Centers  
<http://www.addyc.org>

National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition  
<http://www.nasetalliance.org/>

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities  
<http://www.nichcy.org/resources/transition101.asp>

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (sign up to receive the Center's bi-monthly newsletter)  
<http://www.nsttac.org>

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition  
<http://www.ncset.org/>



## **Representational Portfolios..., cont.**

should include information about the technology, how the student uses it and what supports they need in order to access it.

For example, in her Portfolio, a young woman who uses an augmentative communication device included a powerful picture of herself using the device in combination with a speaker phone to arrange her own transportation. The narrative emphasized what she could do and how she did it rather than focusing on a disability label and what she could not do. Pictures of her at home illustrated how her house was organized and made accessible so she could navigate independently using her wheelchair and make breakfast for her younger sister each morning.

### **Family and Youth Involvement**

Inviting families and youth to participate in, or even take the lead on the development of the Portfolio helps initiate conversations around transition and the vision each person has for the youth's life after high school. IDEA 2004 requires IEPs to contain Post-School Goals for youth beginning with the IEP to be in effect when the student turns 16, or earlier if appropriate. These goals will drive the student's curriculum and experiences for the remainder of their school experience. It is critical for youth and families to have input and to take the lead in directing those paths or transition plans to ensure that youth are well prepared to reach their Post-School Goals. Through sharing information about what each student does at home, in the community and at school, the Portfolio illuminates functional environments, activities, and skills that a student could benefit from acquiring. This information can help teams complete the IEP Present Levels of Performance section in the areas of employment, training, academics, and independent living.

Several young people have piloted using their Portfolios to introduce themselves at IEP meetings or transitional meetings as they move from middle school to high school. One student took his Portfolio on the family vacation to share information about himself with his extended family. The pictures and text support his communication with people who may have a difficult time understanding his speech. Another young man who typically is reluctant to share information at his IEP meetings (about his likes and dislikes, various work experiences, what he wants to do in the future, etc.) is much more conversant when people can reference pictures and information from his Portfolio. This tool provides an avenue to increase family and youth participation in IEP and other meetings.

### **Promoting Self-Advocacy Skills**

As narrative information and pictures are collected to

communicate about supports that students use, strategies and conditions that are effective for them, and environments that allow them to participate and contribute maximally, students can begin to learn what works for them and what accommodations they need...then they can begin to advocate for themselves using the Portfolio strategy. Developing a Portfolio offers a perfect opportunity to begin mentoring young adults in self-advocacy.

### **Nuts and Bolts of the Portfolio**

Microsoft Power Point presentation software is an easy-to-use system for developing Portfolios. Various slide templates are available; background graphics can be selected and changed; and pictures can be easily imported into each slide. The Portfolio can then be shared electronically through a computer slideshow presentation (which might be more accessible for a technology user) or the individual slides can be printed in color on standard-sized paper, placed in clear sheet protectors, and displayed in a hinged binder. The best binders can be opened to create stand-up tabletop easels for professional-looking presentations.

It is important to remember that the pictures and narrative in the Portfolio should communicate the best of the student - their interests, activities, experiences, how they accomplish tasks, and successful support strategies. The idea is to create a comprehensive, optimistic picture of the young person which provides, in a unique and visual way, information about how to support them to participate, contribute, and function at their very best.

### **Conclusion**

Though it was originally designed and piloted as a job development tool, the Representational Portfolio can be a powerful instrument in assisting transition-age youth, their families, and their IEP team members. Not only does the Portfolio allow for greater family and student involvement in the IEP process, it aids in the development of self-advocacy skills, provides guidance for transition planning, and promotes full inclusion by accentuating student strengths and the conditions and supports that allow them to perform at their true maximum potential.

*Mast, M., Sweeney J., & West, M. (2002) Presentation Portfolios. Job Training & Placement Report. 26.9. 1-3.*

*Mast, M. Sweeney, J. , & West, M. (2001). Using presentational portfolios for effective job representation of individuals with disabilities. Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation. 16. 135-140.*

*Callahan, M. & Garner, B. (1997). Keys to the Work Place: Skills and Supports. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing Co.*



## Transition TIP

From Parents, Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK)

Like managing money, cleaning the house, and working responsibly, managing their own health care is something that teens can learn from their parents and family members. Teens need to learn about their insurance coverage, their individual medical conditions, the importance of basic appointment etiquette, and about basic medical record keeping.

Introduce your teen to age-appropriate resources and support groups where he or she can find out more about his or her disability and medical conditions. Teach basic advocacy and awareness by reminding your teen to ask the doctor for more information about his or her disability or illness and about what he or she can expect from their body now and in the future. Offer to help find information, and provide clear explanations whenever possible. Describe what a medical history is and why it is important for medical professionals to know your teenager's medical history.

Where might Portfolios fit into this?

1. Relevant portions of the Portfolio can be used to introduce the young adult to new medical providers.
2. Portfolios can include health information...for example, if someone uses a mobile oxygen tank, the Portfolio can include a photograph of her working in the community while wearing the tank in a backpack (not only does this communicate the medical support the individual needs, it also shows she can be gainfully employed...it portrays competence).

Author contact information: Roger Holt, Parents, Let's Unite for Kids, [rholt@pluk.org](mailto:rholt@pluk.org) ; 516 N 32nd St, Billings MT 59101-6003; Telephone (406) 255-0540, Toll Free (800) 222-7585, FAX(406) 255-0523

## Recommended Reading for the New Year

Rural Institute Transition Projects staff recommends you add the following book to your New Year reading list:

*Transition Portfolios for Students with Disabilities – How to Help Students, Teachers, and Families Handle New Settings*

By MaryAnn Demchak and Robin G. Greenfield, published by Corwin Press Inc.

The book may be ordered from this Web site: <http://www.corwinpress.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book225481>

The authors' conception of and suggested uses for Transition Portfolios are a bit different than what you've seen described elsewhere in this newsletter, but they offer ideas for gathering and capturing information that our readers might find useful. In addition, they provide extensive guidance (supported with concrete examples) about how to include medical information in Portfolios.



*A "must read" for 2008!*

## We Need Your Input

The Rural Institute Transition Projects staff is committed to basing our training, product development, technical assistance, and other resources on what information Montanans with disabilities and those who live and work with them say they most need. This means your input is critical! Please share your suggestions for newsletter, Web conference and/or fact sheet topics. Also, let us know if there are certain templates, tool kits, or other products you would find helpful in navigating the complex world of transition. Ideas can be submitted to Kim Brown ([brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu); 243-4852) or Ellen Condon ([condon@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:condon@ruralinstitute.umt.edu); 243-4134). The mailing address for both Ellen and Kim is: Rural Institute, UM, 634 Eddy, Missoula, MT 59812; the fax number for both is 243-4730. **THANK YOU!**

## Put On Your Thinking Caps

Are you or do you know someone between the ages of 18 and 30 who has a developmental disability and who is living, working, and playing successfully in your/his/her community? Might you or that "emerging leader" be interested in "leading by example" through sharing your/his/her story with transition-age youth? In the near future, we will be asking for nominations of young people who can serve as virtual mentors to students with developmental disabilities. We will provide additional details and an estimated time commitment when we call for nominations. Be thinking of whose name you might submit (with that person's permission, of course)!

We will also be asking for names of energetic, dynamic young people (ages 13-30) with developmental disabilities who can serve on our MT-TIRC Advisory Board. This will involve quarterly meetings, in addition to possible board-related work assignments between meetings. We will provide more information when we issue the request for nominations.



## Creating a Portfolio -The Nuts and Bolts

### Supplies:

- ☐ Digital camera (3.0 megapixels minimum)
  - ◆ Note: if you don't have a digital camera, you can take pictures with a regular camera and have them saved onto a CD when you take them in for developing, or you can scan the photographs into your computer
- ☐ Floppy disk, USB connector, or other means of saving and transferring from camera to computer
- ☐ Charged batteries
- ☐ MS PowerPoint or other presentation program
- ☐ Color printer
- ☐ Presentation binder with clear sheet protectors
  - ◆ This is the presentation binder style we recommend:



### Portfolio Wording:

- ☐ Use action-oriented language (descriptive verbs)
- ☐ Portray competence and be specific
  - ◆ "Performs yard work at home"
  - ◆ "Sends email to friends and uses word processing programs on the computer for reports and assignments"
  - ◆ "Manages his diabetes by checking his blood sugar level three times a day"
  - ◆ "Completed a work experience serving condiments in the school cafeteria"
- ☐ Minimize verbiage (pictures speak more loudly than words)
- ☐ Make sure text matches photos
- ☐ Include the student's vision for the future and what they need to help them achieve that vision

### Portfolio Photos – General Suggestions:

- ☐ Take your time; gently and smoothly push the camera button
- ☐ Use a flash as needed
- ☐ Get close to the subject/action
- ☐ Remember – digital photos can be erased so take lots and use only quality photos in the Portfolio

- ☐ Turn off the date/time stamp
- ☐ Pay attention to the background in the photo
- ☐ Make sure the student isn't wearing the same clothes in all the photos
- ☐ Don't use the same photograph more than once in the Portfolio
- ☐ Try to use only one picture per page
- ☐ Consider covering the entire page with a photograph and using a text box for the narrative
- ☐ Take action photos that show the student at her or his best...capture competence

### Portfolio Photos - What Pictures to Include?

- ☐ Use the Portfolio Planning Worksheet available at: [http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/form\\_portplan.asp](http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/form_portplan.asp)
- ☐ Use photos from Discovery activities
- ☐ Start with a portrait-quality photo to introduce the student...first impressions are important
- ☐ Contributions (personal attributes, experiences, training, etc.)
- ☐ Connections to the community (clubs, teams, religious organizations, 4-H, scouting, friends, etc.)
- ☐ Skills and abilities
- ☐ Supports and strategies that work for the student
- ☐ Job tasks (operating a lawn mower, entering data on a computer, recording CDs, painting, etc.)
- ☐ Preferences and interests

### Final Thoughts:

- ☐ As you review the Portfolio, ask yourself, "What does this portray? Is it respectful? Informative? Accurate? Does it emphasize strengths, abilities, and strategies that work?"
- ☐ Portfolios should be living creations...add photos and update them as the student learns, grows, and experiences new things
- ☐ Most importantly – use the Portfolio! It can be a powerful tool, but not if it's stuck on a shelf somewhere...



## Transition Projects' **Updated** Training Calendar

The Transition Projects has eight Web-based conferences scheduled for 2007/2008. The audio portion of the Web conferences can be accessed from any telephone and the video portion from a computer with Internet access. Interested individuals may participate from their own offices or homes, and there is no cost for any of the sessions. Audio recordings of conferences that have already taken place may be downloaded from the Rural Institute Transition Projects and PLUK Web sites (<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition>; <http://www.pluk.org>).

"Alternatives to Guardianship"	12/3 from 1-2:30
"Montana VR: Navigating the Transition from School to Work"	1/7 from 1-2:30
"Montana Youth Leadership Forum"	2/4 from 1-2:30
"Using Assistive Technology in Transition Planning"	3/3 from 1-2:30
"Montana's Disability Navigators"	4/7 from 1-2:30
"Mental Health Services and Youth Transition to the Adult World"	5/5 from 1-2:30
"Independent Living Centers as a Resource to Youth in Transition"	6/2 from 1-2:30
"Self-Advocacy Skills for Transition-Age Youth"	8/4 from 1-2:30

Individual session fliers and registration forms will be sent to Montana Transition Listserv members. To join the Montana Transition Listserv, send your email address to Kim Brown at [brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu). Fliers may also be downloaded from the Transition Projects Web site at <http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/> as they become available.

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**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>