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CENTER FOR DISABILITIES AND DEVELOPMENT

# Possibilities in Education and Training

*A quarterly publication of the Center for Disabilities and Development, Iowa's University Center for Excellence on Disabilities at University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital, Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1011*

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## ***Family Support and High Expectations Lead to Successful Community Employment***

***By SueAnn Morrow, Employment Services Specialist, Money Follows the Person Program***

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Daniel Toops's story is a story of love, commitment, grit, collaboration, and perseverance. Beginning with a rough birth as well as early years, Daniel and his family have worked relentlessly to ensure his success.

In 2005, Daniel's parents made the painful, but necessary, decision to have him move from his home and be served in an Intermediate Care Facility (ICF-ID) operated by an agency about one hour from his home. Katherine, his mother, basically became the "night staff" of the house. She would work at her teaching job during the day and then

drive the one hour to be with Daniel at night. The family wanted to make sure things went smoothly. After two weeks of this grueling schedule, the family decided that she could no longer do this. For the next 6 years, Daniel's parents, older sister and younger brother visited every weekend.

In 2013, Daniel moved into an ICF-ID operated by Hills and Dales in Dubuque. It was much closer to home and made it easier for everyone. He graduated from Hempstead High in 2017.

Planning for Daniel's future began several years before graduation. He has been diagnosed with Autism, Intellectual Disability, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Expressive-Language Disorder. While these labels don't mean much in and of themselves, the behaviors or limitations that come with them have significantly impacted Daniel's life. His inability to express himself and understand social cues and expectations have sometimes led to aggression as well as isolation. His family expected him to work, and given his behaviors and intense support needs, self-employment looked like a good option. After trying a couple of potential ideas, Daniel seemed to enjoy making Firestarters. With that interest, Just Toops LLC and JT FireStarters were born.

With the help of the Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) Self Employment Program, Just Toops incorporated, wrote a business plan, and found a temporary home. The matching grant they received from IVRS enabled them to purchase some of the necessary equipment, as well as work with C.True Designs to develop their website, brochure, package labels and business cards. Even though Daniel was still in school, he was a business owner. Following Daniel's graduation, they found a permanent location for the business.

As Daniel's graduation approached, Hills and Dales staff began focusing on his residential support needs. They thought living in a smaller setting with fewer roommates would be good for him. With the help of Money Follows the Person (MFP), Daniel moved to a house with 3 other roommates in early 2017. MFP provides one year of intensive supports to Medicaid recipients on select waivers who wish to move from congregate settings to the community.

Working with MFP Transition Specialist Lori LaCarte, the move was both smooth and successful. The young men got to know each other before the move, sharing several meals. The staff from the new house visited the ICF, with ICF staff reciprocating, making recommendations and suggestions. It was helpful that the new house was also operated by Hills and Dales.

Daniel is happy and enjoys doing the typical activities of young men his age. When the family visits, he is glad to see them. But when the visit is over, he walks them to the door.

Daniel also continues to enjoy his employment. He makes each Firestarter by hand, stuffing egg carton "sections" with dryer lint and shredded paper. Melted candle wax is then drizzled on top. They are packaged 10 to a bag with 10 bags to a case. The family delivers the finished product to various retail outlets. Currently, they are sold in almost 100 stores in 8 states. On average, they sell 2,700 bags a year.

Daniel and his family are grateful for all the support they have received. Without assistance, creativity and flexibility of the IVRS Counselor, the work of the school personnel, the cooperation of Imagine the Possibilities (the agency that first housed the business) and the support of Hills and Dales, the business would not be as successful as it is. Additionally, the donations from a variety of businesses and individuals are also critical. People donate candles for the wax, the local hospital donates the dryer lint, schools and churches donate the shredded paper, and Kwik Star donates the boxes to transport the finished product. As Katherine explains, the expense is in the labels and bags. The business has a small profit margin so all costs are closely scrutinized. Daniel and his family hope to corner the market, make a profit, and employ more individuals with autism.

If anyone is thinking about starting their own FireStarter business, please think of the ramifications. For example, the market for them could easily become diluted and it would be competition for Daniel's business. What would further the field would be to develop new and other creative self-employment enterprises.

To find out how to purchase a bag of firestarters, go to the business's website [www.justtoops.com](http://www.justtoops.com). A list of the many outlets is available there. See which one is near you!! Or if you are in your local Theisen's Farm-Home-Auto store, Norbys or Hy-Vee, ask about them. I can tell you from personal experience, they work great!

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## ***Help Me to Understand...in the DRL***

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***The Cartoon and script curriculum for teaching social behavior and communication: using visual strategies to support behavioral programming for individuals with ASD.*** Bernard-Opitz, Vera. Illustrated by Andra Bernard. Lenexa, KS: AAPC Publishing, [2017].

“This easy-to-use book is designed to help children with ASD find friends, become better communicators, increase their flexibility and live lives that are less stressful. Skills are presented in the form of cartoons, scripts and role play – all evidence-based practices – that address a wide range of developmental levels. This book breaks down complex behaviors into manageable steps and provides methods to help children and youth generalize skills across settings and people.”

***Inclusion in action: practical strategies to modify your curriculum.*** Eredics, Nicole. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2018.

“Equally useful as a beginner’s guide to inclusion and a goldmine of practical ideas for experienced teachers, this must-have book will help make your curriculum “possible and achievable” for every learner, with or without disabilities.”

***It’s more than “Just being in”: creating authentic inclusion for students with complex support needs.*** Jorgensen, Cheryl M. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2018.

“Taking the stress and uncertainty out of inclusion, top expert Cheryl M. Jorgensen guides you step by step through her accessible approach to creating inclusive learning environments for students with autism, Down syndrome, intellectual disability and multiple disabilities. You’ll get a clear rationale for meaningful inclusion and learn how to use strengths-based, person-centered planning to meet the needs of each individual student.” -publisher

***Does time heal all? Exploring mental health in the first 3 years.***

Keren, Miri, et al. Washington, DC: Zero to Three, 2018.

“This book is intended for all those interested in the infant’s psychological development, whether normative or abnormal; for all those wishing to learn how to diagnose disorders that might appear as early as the first year of life; and particularly, for all parents who rightly want to be able to trace the thin line between normative behavior, even if extreme at times, and abnormal behavior caused by some psychological disorder requiring therapeutic intervention.”

***The A-Z of therapeutic parenting: strategies and solutions.*** Naish, Sarah. London; Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018.

“Parents of children with attachment difficulties, or who have experienced childhood trauma, need to parent differently to meet their child’s specific needs and help them start to make sense of the world. This book is everything you need to therapeutically parent, with an easy to apply model of intervention, and an A-Z of practical advice.”

***The autism discussion page on the core challenges of autism: a toolbox for helping children with autism feel safe, accepted, and competent.*** Nason, William. London; Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2014.

“The Autism Discussion Page blue book focuses on the core challenges associated with autism (cognitive, sensory, social, and emotional) and provides concise, accessible information, and simple tools for supporting children with these vulnerabilities.”

***“Why didn’t they just say that?”: Teaching secondary students with high-functioning autism to decode the social world using PEERspective: an evidence-based practice: peer-mediated instruction and intervention.*** Schmidt, Jennifer M. Shawnee, KS: AAPC Publishing, 2018.

“The atmosphere in any classroom isn’t simply defined by the purposeful setup and thoughtful lesson plans; it’s also the feeling you get when you walk into the room. Often students who struggle socially have never experienced the feeling of being accepted and celebrated at school. By creating a foundation of mutual respect and acceptance right from the start, PEERspective often becomes a safe haven for all students and a refreshing break in the day.”

“Few things in the world are more powerful than a positive push.  
A smile. A word of optimism and hope.”

– *Richard M. DeVos*

### ***How to get in touch with POSSIBILITIES:***

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#### **Disability Resource Library**

**PHONE:** 800-272-7713

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**WEBSITE:** [uichildrens.org/cdd/drl/](http://uichildrens.org/cdd/drl/)

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