

Possibilities

in Education and Training

Summer 2022



The Possibilities are Endless

By Mike Hoenig, *Project Director, Conner Training Connection* and
Michelle Johnston, *Administrative Services Coordinator, Iowa UCEDD*

(Editor's Note: I am pleased to share authorship of this article with my friend and colleague, Michelle Johnston. Michelle currently works as an Administrative Services Coordinator with Iowa's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). She will assume full editorship of this newsletter upon my retirement in August. As a supporter of community inclusion and a person familiar with both the Conner Training Connection (CTC) and Money Follows the Person (MFP), Michelle will bring a fresh, insightful perspective to this publication. Welcome Michelle!)

As I considered ideas for what would be my last issue of Possibilities, I reached out to MFP program staff for suggestions. Within minutes, Transition Specialist Jo Schumacher suggested a "where are they now" column charting the progress of individuals highlighted in past Possibilities issues. We thought that sounded fun and exciting, and so did our ever-supportive, flexible DHS program officer, Connie Fanselow. As you'll see, the people we interviewed liked the idea, too!



Personal Empowerment and Policy Wonk: Brady Werger

We first interviewed Brady in the spring of 2019. He'd been out of the Glenwood Resource Center (GRC) for about a year and was enjoying the new freedoms of his life in the community: jobs, freedom to go to choir practice without being "assessed," playing in two praise bands, and having friends besides staff who cared about him. He had recently spoken to his state senator and was looking forward to attending ID Action's "Advocating Change Day." *Three years later ...*

Brady will soon be moving to eastern Iowa to be near his family and his girl friend. "I'm really excited about the move," he tells me.

At the time of this writing (June 2022), Brady is vice-chair of the Iowa DD Council. He will assume the chair position in July. He is a well-established presence in state government and is on a first-name basis with Iowa DHS director Kelly Garcia and Medicaid Director Liz Matney. He met Governor Kim Reynolds last spring and subsequently talked about that experience during a DD Council "Capitol Chat." When I praised him for his work at the state level, he said, "Don't forget the work I've done locally. I talked to the Glenwood city administrator to help that guy in the wheelchair by making sidewalk

The Possibilities are Endless

improvements on a city bridge.” Brady received the Iowa DD Council’s first annual Mia Peterson Self-Advocacy Award at last October’s “Make Your Mark” conference and plans to nominate the person who he hopes will be his successor. He continues to serve as a Community Living Ambassador, encouraging others who may be considering a move to the community.



Still Awesome: Jessica Rose Williams

When we introduced you to Jessica in the winter 2020 edition, she was “babysitting a cash register

full-time” and living with her friend Bev in Urbandale. She kept us laughing throughout her Community Living Ambassador presentation at Woodward, telling me at one point that she liked me to call her “awesome Jess.” She told her audience that the most important thing was advocating. *Two and a half years later ...*

Jessica and her friend Bev now own a home in Johnston. She’s still an active Community Living Ambassador and is looking forward to doing a presentation in Des Moines this fall. She’s still babysitting that cash register at Walgreens, but only part-time.

“I started at DMACC a year ago,” Jessica tells me with incredible excitement. “I’m getting my AA in liberal arts and am taking psychology and biology classes so I can get into the medical field in the long-term future. I got on the dean’s list! I’m extremely proud of myself and ecstatic about that! I’m pretty much livin’ my life to the fullest!”

Father Knows Best: Michael Gillette



When we first introduced you to Michael (Winter, 2020 issue) he was living on his own in a Muscatine apartment, receiving support primarily from his mother. He was enjoying his role as a Community Living Ambassador and contemplating a return to college to earn a journalism degree. *Two and a half years later ...*

Some things are the same, while others are very different. He still lives in Muscatine. He still enjoys his work as a Community Living Ambassador and looks forward to presenting at a fall conference in Des Moines. He’ll have lots to share! In February, he and his girlfriend became parents of a daughter, Sakura.

I asked Michael about his college plans. “I’m going in a different direction for now,” he responded with calm satisfaction in his voice. “I’m a stay-at-home dad. Sakura is pretty verbal, and she keeps me busy.”

The Possibilities are Endless



Still Strong: Eric Mullins

When we first caught up with Eric (Summer 2020 issue), he'd recently moved from the Woodward Resource Center (WRC) to a house in Waterloo. He was enjoying outdoor activities like grilling out and fishing. COVID, which held a tight grip on the world, had closed down his day

programming and made the process of finding a job extremely difficult. *Two years later ...*

Eric has a job! "I work at Sunnyside Golf Course in Waterloo," he says proudly. "I'm a groundskeeper and I drive a tractor. I Love it!"

Eric has made many other changes since we last spoke. "I moved to Cedar Falls," he tells me. "I like the house because it's quieter here sometimes. I still love to hunt and fish, and I now have a girl friend! We started dating in October."

Eric is one of the new Community Living Ambassadors. "I like it because I can help other people think about moving out," Eric tells me. "I spoke last fall at "Make Your Mark." I was nervous but I think I did okay."

This writer heard that speech. He believes that Eric did more than just okay-he was fantastic!



Blazing a Trail: Daniel Toops

Guest columnist SueAnn Morrow, retired MFP Employment Services Specialist, introduced us to Daniel Toops

and his family in the fall of 2018. Prior to his 2017 high school graduation, Daniel, with the help of his family and Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS), had launched a firestarter business, Just Toops, LLC. They were averaging annual sales of 2,700 bags of 10 firestarters, with product available in nearly 100 stores in eight states. *Nearly four years later ...*

"We've more than doubled our sales, and our product is sold in 120 stores," explains Daniel's mother Katherine. "We truly are a community business, and we're grateful to Goodwill and Mercy Hospital in Dubuque for their ongoing donations of supplies."

Just Toops, LLC, is truly a family operation. Daniel serves as the "face" of the business and spends approximately 17 hours a month making firestarters. his parents and grandparents assemble, market, and distribute product. They've converted family living space into storage space for the egg cartons, candle wax, paper and lint needed for each Firestarter.

"One very exciting change which I want to share is that just over a year ago, we hired a young man with Down syndrome named Ben to work for us," says Katherine. "He's doing a great job and we want to keep him as long as he wants to stay! We're committed to providing job opportunities for people with disabilities besides Daniel."

The Possibilities are Endless

Near the end of our time together, Katherine said, “Just a minute. I have to look at this text.” The text turned out to be confirmation that Just Toops, LLC would be hiring a new employee named Coltin, who also experiences a disability. That’s walking the talk!



Learning Life Lessons: Ty Launderville

Possibilities readers first met Ty in the Winter 2020 edition. At that time, he was a 19-year-old living in Carroll and trying to figure out his future path. Activities revolved around cleaning his apartment, budgeting, learning social skills, and walking his dog. *Two and a half years later ...*

“Everything has changed since then,” Ty explains candidly. “I moved to Des Moines in March 2021 to live with my girl friend at the time. I had to find a new Consumer Choices Option provider, and her stepdad filled that role. She and I are now more like family. We moved to a south side apartment last August.”

“I started school at DMACC last fall to study liberal arts and history. I got into an accident and had to withdraw because I couldn’t pay for both my tuition and car repairs.”

“After that, I got a job with Amazon. I worked there for six months as a package delivery driver. Even though I was once recognized for being the

Number Two delivery driver in the state, the job wasn’t good for me. I worked 12 hours a day, 3 days a week. One day when I was scheduled to make 190 stops, I had a flat tire and had to sit on the side of the road for five hours! I just couldn’t take it physically or emotionally and had to quit.”

“I found a job as a parts delivery driver with O’Reilly Auto Parts, and I love it. It’s Monday through Friday, 9 to 5. I plan to stay there for awhile.”

“I want people to understand that living in the community can be challenging. It’s not always easy, but the important thing is to learn lessons as you go. It’s definitely worth it! I’m looking forward to being a groomsman at my sister’s wedding next month in the Ozarks. I still love giving speeches for the Ambassadors, and I’ll be doing that again in September at “Make Your Mark” in Des Moines. I’m a free man!”

A Special Thank You ...

By Mike Hoenig, Project Director, Conner Training Connection

When my friend and mentor, Dave Leshtz, resigned his position at the Iowa University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) in 2003, I was asked to serve as the Conner Training Connection's new project director. Given my lifetime commitment to community inclusion, I was honored to assume this new responsibility, which included quarterly publication of this newsletter.

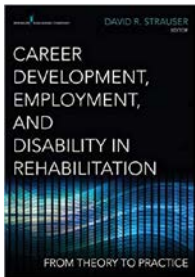
From 2003 to 2012, feature stories in Possibilities described disability-related activities and events happening throughout Iowa. In 2013, we transitioned (pun intended) to sharing the experiences of Money Follows the Person (MFP) participants, whose lives were transformed after moving from congregate to community-based settings. The one constant throughout the Possibilities era has been the inclusion of a column showcasing items from Iowa's Disability Resource Library.

I wish to thank the aforementioned Dave Leshtz for sharing useful "tricks of the trade," respecting me as a colleague, and instilling in me the confidence to take on this role. Thanks to my friend and colleague, retired Iowa UCEDD director Bob Bacon, for believing in me as I grew into the position. I also extend gratitude to friend, colleague, and current UCEDD director Derrick Willis for continuing to recognize and support the Conner Training Connection (CTC) as an integral piece of our program.

Over the past 19 years, I've had the pleasure of working with so many professionals to bring this publication to you, our readers, every three months. Retired graphic designer Lori Popp and our current graphic designer Leigh Bradford have made each edition pleasing to the eye, while retaining screen reader accessibility. Disability Resource Librarian Mitch DeFauw is following the legacy left by his predecessor, the late Mary Hubbard, to share timely and informative publications. UCEDD Communications and Information Dissemination Manager Meredith Field continues to grow our social media presence and provide timely analytics data essential to expanding readership of this newsletter and ensuring that our funder, the Iowa Department of Human Services, sees value in its outreach. MFP program staff, including former program manager Brooke Lovelace, current program manager Lindsey Robertson, and many MFP transition specialists have spent hours facilitating my contact with program participants featured in our lead stories.

Speaking of MFP program participants, thanks to each of them for sharing their life experiences. Without those experiences, we wouldn't have a newsletter. And without you, our valued readers, we wouldn't have an audience! I thank you for the many words of encouragement I've received from you over the years, and invite you to continue to enjoy this publication whose editorship, I proudly hand off to my UCEDD colleague and recent CTC shadow, Michelle Johnston.

The UIHC Center for Disabilities and Development's Disability Resource Library is happy to share the below collection of books on the topics of adulthood transition and career development. Ensuring that individuals with disabilities attain the proper skills and knowledge for adult life is an intrinsic responsibility for educators and caregivers. It is the hope of the DRL that the below resources can assist with the education of this transition process. Each of these books are now available for check out at the DRL. For more information or recommendations of further resources, please contact Mitch DeFauw at mitchell-defauw@uiowa.edu.



Career Development, Employment, and Disability in Rehabilitation: from Theory to Practice

by David R. Strauser, PhD, editor.

This highly regarded resource provides comprehensive coverage of vocational behavior and employment

theory and intervention techniques as they apply to individuals with disabilities. Scholarly yet practical, the second edition is updated with key information and research, delivering new employment statistics, employment rates, and poverty levels of people with disabilities.

Demystifying Transition Assessment

by Colleen Thoma PhD and Ronald Tamura PhD

Assessment is the cornerstone of every good transition plan. This book demystifies the what, when, why, and how of collecting transition assessment data—and using the results to help students with disabilities prepare for adulthood. Developed by two respected transition authorities, this practical guide prepares education professionals to use today's best assessment tools and strategies to identify which transition approaches really work.



The Down Syndrome Transition Handbook: Charting Your Child's Course to Adulthood (Topics in Down Syndrome)

by Jo Ann Simons

The Down Syndrome Transition Handbook helps parents prepare their child for independent adult life. Topics include step-by-step instructions to help families envision their child's future, how to develop a transition plan, and how

to implement it. This book also contains a wealth of information about adults in their twenties or thirties living at home and their pursuit in finding a job, locating housing, establishing a meaningful life in their community, and achieving more independence with the right guidance and supports.



Launching into Adulthood: An Integrated Response to Support Transition of Youth with Chronic Health Conditions and Disabilities

by Donald Lollar EdD

As adolescents with disabilities or chronic health conditions reach adulthood, they face complex

challenges related to employment, education, housing, health care, and community participation. Coordinated, well-organized transition services could make all the difference—and this cutting-edge volume gives decision-makers a clear vision to work toward as they reform today's fragmented system.

Universal Design for Transition: A Roadmap for Planning and Instruction

by Colleen Thoma PhD, Christina Bartholomew PhD and LaRon Scott EdD

Apply the principles of universal design for learning to transition for students with disabilities with this groundbreaking guidebook. Schools across the country already use universal design for learning to improve all students' access to the general curriculum and tap each learner's individual strengths—and now they'll have a practical book that takes this powerful teaching approach one step further for students approaching the transition to adult life.

Possibilities in Education and Training is a quarterly publication of University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital Center for Disabilities and Development, Iowa's University Center for Excellence on Developmental Disabilities. It is an outreach initiative of the Conner Training Connection, a program funded by the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) to support the transition of individuals with disabilities from congregate to community-based settings.

“Our lives begin to end the day that we become silent about things that matter.”

—Martin Luther King Jr.

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