

Possibilities

in Education and Training

Fall 2025



Supporting Community Living: The Conner Training Connection

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In 2017, Dawson
received Conner
funds for a privacy
fence.

Dawson can now
enjoy time by himself
outside safely.



For more than three decades, the Conner Training Connection (CTC) grant program has helped make community living possible for Iowans with disabilities. Each year, the Iowa Legislature provides appropriation funding for the program, which is administered by the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services and the Center for Disabilities and Development. CTC uses this funding to support educational resources like the *Possibilities in Education and Training* newsletter and the Conner Training Connection website (DisabilityTraining.org aka DTO). It also offers financial assistance to help individuals move from State Resource Centers into homes or community-based settings through the Money Follows the Person (MFP) program.

This annual appropriation exists because of a landmark consent decree in 1994, which challenged Iowa's institution-based service model for individuals with developmental disabilities, advocating for their integration into community-based settings when institutional care was unnecessary. The case was brought by the Iowa Protection and Advocacy Services, now known as Disability Rights Iowa, on behalf of Evert Conner and other residents of Glenwood and Woodward State Hospital-

In 2023, Nick
received a
yearlong YMCA
membership
which opened
doors to a wide
range of activities.



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Since moving to DeWitt in 2015, Kendra has experienced several “firsts” including going to a fair, rodeo and circus and learning to cook. “I love making spaghetti and garlic bread,” beamed Kendra.

Schools. The initial complaint was filed on December 8, 1986, with the lawsuit being filed December 9, 1993. The consent decree was approved on December 2, 1994, paving the way for more community-based options.

Evert Conner’s story is at the heart of this change. After leaving Glenwood Resource Center, he moved to Iowa City and enjoyed life in the community. Evert joined a church, took typing and computer classes, worked at Goodwill Industries, and volunteered at the University Hospitals library. Though he lived in a group home, he never gave up on his dream of living independently. Evert passed away on October 1, 1993, after six years outside the institution, years he called the best of his life.

The original focus of the Conner Training Connection in 1994 was on training and community capacity building to support people with disabilities choosing to live in the community. Mini grants were given to support training for people with disabilities, families, and providers, along with the creation of the Conner Training Connection (DisabilityTraining.org aka DTO) website and the *Possibilities in Education and Training* newsletter.

In 2001, funds were repurposed to support transition from State Resource Centers to community living. From 2001 to 2008, the Conner Training Connection supported 36 individuals in their transition to community living. Some of the approved expenditures were initial household set up, rent, medical equipment, personal items, items to reduce social isolation, and additional hours for staff to support individuals immediately following transition.

The collaboration with Money Follows the Person (MFP) began in 2009. The Money Follows the Person (MFP) program supports eligible Medicaid recipients with funding for transition services and enhanced supports



Jenny has some sage advice for anyone thinking about moving to the community from a nursing home or other facility. “Never give up!”

during their first year in the community. The Conner Training Connection pays for items not fundable under MFP, or when participants’ transition or retention expenditures exceed the MFP spending limit. Typical uses of funds include the first few months’ rent/ utilities or groceries until SSI payments begin flowing to the individual. Other uses include paying for staff training, items to set up the household, or items to reduce social isolation. This could include YMCA memberships to allow for exercise and socialization during

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“I joined a local church and asked if I could help by playing my guitar. Now, I’m in two praise bands. When our pastor, who was one of my best advocates, left our church, people came up to me and asked how they could help me. I now have 10 or 11 volunteers who take turns driving me to church.” Brady, 2019

the winter months, or board games to be able to play with roommates and staff. Since the collaboration with MFP began, CTC has supported nearly 300 individuals.

The *Possibilities in Education and Training* newsletter has been produced since the mid-1990’s. Early issues focused on events and resources of interest to the disability community. With the transition to supporting MFP participants and the advent of social media, the Events of Interest section was replaced with a lead story highlighting a successful MFP participant’s move to community living. And the Resources section has grown through a partnership with the Disability Resource Library (DRL), located at the Center for Disabilities and Development.

The DTO website is Iowa’s central resource for disability-related education and support. The site features disability related trainings held virtually and around Iowa, along with an interactive training calendar. It provides tools and information for individuals with disabilities, their families, and service providers. It also offers links to partner resources and promotes best practices for transitioning from institutional care to community-based living. Guided by its mission to advance inclusion, DTO works to ensure that Iowans with disabilities can live as fully participating members of their communities.

The Conner Training Connection is proud to continue Evert Conner’s legacy by breaking down barriers and opening doors for Iowans with disabilities. Through education, helpful

resources, and financial support, CTC makes it possible for individuals to move from institutional care into homes where they can live and be part of their communities. Through strong partnerships and continued commitment, we are turning inclusion into reality for Iowans year after year.



LeQuan moved into her own apartment in January 2018. “The [MFP] Program has been a God-send,” LeQuan says emphatically. “Lindsey used funds to pay my apartment deposit, buy furniture, and get groceries. Both Lindsey and Julie Adams, my new transition specialist, have gone way above and beyond the call of duty!”

Discover a Story Where Every Voice Counts

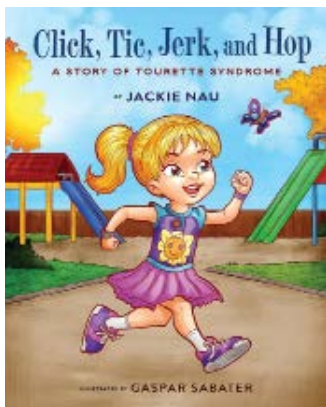
While there are an enormous number of books of fiction available, it is too bad that very few of them feature characters with disabilities as their primary focus. The Disability Resource Library is excited to highlight books that do just that by featuring diverse disabilities and stories for every reader, from grade school to adult fiction.

You can browse through and find these books and others at the disability resource library online catalog at uichildrens.org/drl-catalog. For further information or questions, you may contact the disability resource librarian, Mitch DeFauw, at mitchell-defauw@uiowa.edu.



Author Spotlight: Jackie Nau

Click, Tic, Jerk, and Hop is a beautifully written, picture book that tells the story of a young child navigating life with Tourette Syndrome. Through relatable experiences, the book captures her confusion and frustration as her body and voice behave in ways she can't control, feelings that often lead to isolation. With courage and self-discovery, she learns to embrace her uniqueness and inspire others to do the same.



Based on Jackie Nau's personal journey with motor and vocal tics, this heartfelt story pairs vibrant illustrations with an uplifting message of empathy, inclusion, and acceptance. More than just a book, it's a valuable resource for children, families, and educators, offering practical insights and celebrating the beauty of individuality.



DISABILITY EXCHANGE

Learn more about Jackie Nau on the Disability Exchange Podcast

In this episode, Mike and Judy sit down with Jackie as she shares her personal journey of living with Tourette Syndrome, how she became a published author, and even reflects on her time working at CDD!

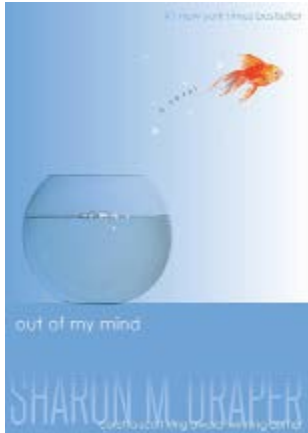
The Disability Exchange (DX) podcast is produced and presented by the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Iowa's UCEDD, at the Center for Disabilities and Development. Join UCEDD staff and podcast co-hosts, Mike Hoenig and Judy Warth, for this engaging series.

All episodes of the DX podcast are available on the Anchor by Spotify platform.

Or search for "Disability Exchange" wherever you get your podcasts. And find links to a variety of other platforms on the DX Anchor by Spotify page.

Listen to episode here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/0XkkGknQhJLNz5DxprHL4y?si=kke_BEfURli5hFbfo0QAiA

Transcript: https://cdd.center.uiowa.edu/sites/cdd.center.uiowa.edu/files/2024-06/episode_2.6_-_tourettes_lived_family_experience_and_a_big_heart_with_jackie_nau_final.pdf

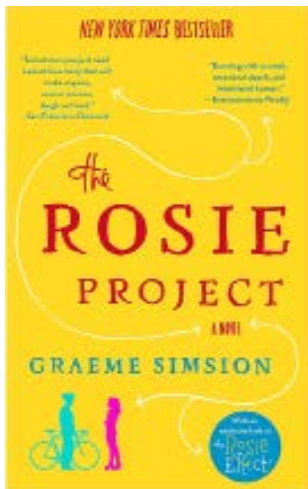


Out of My Mind

by Sharon M. Draper

Melody is not like most people. She cannot walk or talk, but she has a photographic memory; she can remember every detail of everything she has ever experienced. She is smarter than most of the adults who try to

diagnose her and smarter than her classmates in her integrated classroom, the very same classmates who dismiss her as mentally challenged because she cannot tell them otherwise. But Melody refuses to be defined by cerebral palsy. And she's determined to let everyone know it, somehow.



The Rosie Project

by Graeme Simsion

Don Tillman, professor of genetics, has never been on a second date. He is a man whose lifelong difficulty with social rituals has convinced him that he is simply not wired for romance. So when an acquaintance informs him that he would make

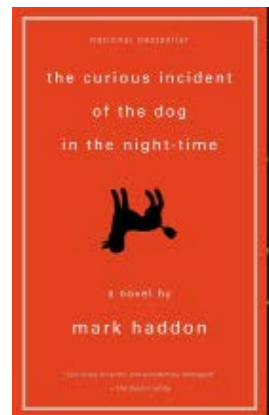
a "wonderful" husband, he embarks upon *The Wife Project* to find the perfect partner. She will be punctual and logical—most definitely not a barmaid, a smoker, a drinker, or a late-arriver. Yet Rosie Jarman is all these things. Don's Wife Project takes a back burner to the Father Project and an unlikely relationship blooms, forcing the scientifically minded geneticist to confront the spontaneous whirlwind that is Rosie.



Freak the Mighty

by Rodman Philbrick

Two boys – a slow learner stuck in the body of a teenage giant and a tiny Einstein in leg braces – forge a unique friendship when they pair up to create one formidable human force. A wonderful story of triumph over imperfection, shame, and loss.



The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

by Mark Haddon

Christopher John Francis Boone knows all the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. And he detests the color yellow. This improbable story of Christopher's quest to investigate the suspicious death of a neighborhood dog makes for one of the most captivating, unusual, and widely heralded novels in recent years.



Marcelo in the Real World

by Francisco X. Stork

Marcelo Sandoval hears music no one else can hear, part of the autism-like impairment no doctor has been able to identify, and he's always attended a special school where his differences have been protected. But the summer after his junior year, his father demands that Marcelo work in his law firm's mailroom to experience "the real world." There Marcelo meets Jasmine, his beautiful and surprising coworker, and Wendell, the son of another partner in the firm.

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 Health and Human Services (HHS) to support the transition of individuals with disabilities from congregate to community-based settings.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

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