

# JOB TRAINING & PLACEMENT REPORT

for professionals who support employment for people with disabilities

## Career Transitioning

*Setting up a Transition Team that Works!*

By Beth Anderson & Amy Moll

**W**hat is the vision of your school transition team? How can you move it to the next level? This article shares the process that our school used to successfully create an effective transition team.

### Background

Historically, the Stoughton Area School District provided special education services like many other school districts across the country, through a traditional system of labeling that categorized students into specific, self-contained programs based on disability. This approach was often not aligned to best practices, nor in compliance with legal requirements.

Since 2004, the district has committed itself to an approach that



Emily completes a variety of tasks for her part-time office job.

meets students' needs through a service delivery model that utilizes a rigorous curriculum, and quality, differentiated instruction in inclusive environments for all students. Through collaboration, all staff share responsibility for meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of all learners.

This vision has reconfigured special education services provided to students. Our focus has moved toward integrative support of students in school and community-based settings, with a focus on student strengths and interests as they prepare for life after high school.

In order to implement more inclusive practices, a considerable degree of preparation was needed. A number of administrators, learning strategists (special educators), and support staff came together to form a planning team to develop and carry out this model of service delivery.

### Creating the Service Delivery Planning Team

Initially, this planning team found it important to ground itself in foundational knowledge of legal and instructional best practices. This was accomplished by attending conferences, networking with other professionals in the field, and scheduling site visits to other schools that had also gone through

the process of changing their service delivery.

The planning team then created a framework defining the path students would take from their junior and senior years — to their transition years, as well as determining the staff that would work with them.

All students with disabilities continue to take high school classes for credit with their same-age peers and also participate in a few off-campus volunteer and job shadowing experiences. *These students are consid-*

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*By Andrzej Walz-Chojnacki*

Brief Q & A About ENs

ered members of the *IN Team*.

Young adults with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 21 do not typically attend high school. Since our goal is to provide students with disabilities as inclusive an education as possible, these students do not attend any classes at the high school either, but have full schedules that reflect individualized community-based activities. *They are considered members of the OUT Team.*

The remainder of this article focuses on OUT Team students and the services they receive.

### Current Practices

OUT Team students receive services in the community each day in a variety of settings. They may include job sites, volunteer sites, the grocery store, health clubs, the public library, and other recreational locations.

Our aim is to create a schedule that resembles what their lives will look like after receiving public school special education services, with full-time employment being the ultimate goal.

Finding paid work for students with disabilities in a small town during an economic downturn is challenging. Most students work on a part-time basis or have multiple part-time jobs.

During times when students are not engaged in paid employment, they are supported in vocational and leisure activities or volunteer work experiences that reflect individual preferences, with a focus on improving skills they need for employment and independence in daily living activities.

Collaborating with families, staff, and community members helps to coordinate a full schedule based on each student's strengths and needs before aging out of high school.

### Practical Tips

To find paid employment for students, some helpful and practical tips for employers, workplace developers, and educators are:

**Completing a Support Analysis** — All students in work or volunteer sites have a Support Analysis sheet completed. A support analysis outlines the expectations of job tasks, as well as the amount of support and prompting a student needs in order to complete each task. This clear, step-by-step summary provides job coaches with the information they need to encourage students to stay on task and become more independent.

**Collecting Data** — Parents, staff, and outside agencies can use data collected from these sheets to help accurately determine the needs of each student, establish accountability for job coaches, and provide invaluable data to county agencies. This may include the need for assistive technology, natural supports, or other factors that could increase their level of independence.

**Improving Student Independence** — With increased independence at the work site and home setting as a primary goal, we constantly experiment with new techniques, such as the use of visual charts, checklists, timers, cue cards, verbal and non-verbal prompts, cell phone alarms, and natural supports.

**Building Relationships** — Building relationships is an invaluable factor in connecting our students with jobs and volunteer opportunities. Recently, students were asked by a local business to volunteer at a public event because of other work the students had provided for the local Chamber of Commerce. Demonstrating to the community that our students are

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responsible, reliable, and professional workers has established our Transition Team as an invaluable resource to businesses.

### Summary

Restructuring the delivery of services for IN and OUT Teams has been a process involving time, dedication, knowledge, and hard work. Providing students and families with a smooth, well-planned transition to adult life is worth the time and energy all have invested. It is also the expectation, not the choice.

However, our work is not complete, and looking forward to making continuous improvements that

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Matthew's work experience at the Community Senior Center improves his vocational skills.

benefit students, families, and our community is exciting. ■

Beth Anderson and Amy Moll both work for the Stoughton Area (WI) School District. Beth is a High School Transition Coordinator, while Amy is a District Inclusion Support Teacher. They have both presented at National TASH Conferences (Amy at the Baltimore Conference in 2006 and Beth at the Pittsburgh Conference in 2009), as well as at the APSE National Conference in Milwaukee in 2009.

## —Resources—

☞ **FirstJobs.org** offers young adults the tools they need for success in today's economy. The new website includes a "Tool Kit" section for the job-hunting process as well as a regularly updated "Tips" page. Visit <http://firstjobs.org>.

☞ **Professional Destiny: Discover the Career You Were Born For**, by Valerie Hausladen, [www.professionaldestiny.com](http://www.professionaldestiny.com). Adults typically spend over half of their waking hours at work, so they experience a great deal of satisfaction when special skills are applied in the workplace. The author shows how.

☞ **Youandyourdata** is a premiere resource for information regarding your personal information, and how it affects your ability to get or keep a job. For more information, visit [www.youandyourdata.com](http://www.youandyourdata.com).

## Editor's Notebook



I'm pleased to report that this month's newsletter includes articles about mental health issues and behavioral interviews, two of the topics that readers said they wanted to see in *JTPR* in the recent reader survey.

There's no doubt that mental health remains a stigma in many settings, but with an increasing number of Americans suffering from mental health impairments, it's more important than ever to separate myth from fact.

When researching this month's *Training Tool-Kit*, it didn't surprise me that behavioral interviews are a growing trend. In a day and age in which employers have more to lose than ever from poor hiring decisions, they will leave no stone unturned to ensure they have a good job candidate.

However, regardless of the interviewing technique used, the key to the

job seeker landing the job lies in preparation: preparation for the questions to be asked, and research of the company that the person is applying at.

This month's page-one article covers another topic that's always in demand by *JTPR* readers — school-to-work transition. I thank Beth Anderson and Amy Moll for taking the time to provide an article on another important subject.

I never cease to be amazed by the number of people in the integrated employment field who take the time out of already busy schedules to provide articles they want to write, to assist their peers on the job. We're so glad they do because helping you, the reader, is always our intent. Until next time.

*Mike Jacquart*

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## Quick Ideas

# Disclosure Tips to Consider

Telling a prospective employer about a disability is a very personal choice, but the following are some recommendations:

### To Disclose or Not to Disclose

➤ Is the disability visible? How do most people react when they learn about your disability? How do you deal with their reactions?

➤ When do you feel most confident disclosing your disability?

➤ What misconceptions might an employer have about your disability?

➤ If you disclose, would you be able to reassure an employer that the disability will not affect job performance?

➤ What do you know about the employer's policies and experiences

about hiring people with disabilities?

### Be Upbeat

☑ **Be positive.** Focus on your skills and qualifications. Never present a disability as a weakness — disability doesn't equal inability!

☑ **Be prepared.** Address any concerns that an employer might express, even if they're not stated directly.

☑ **Know what workplace accommodations you may require.** This should include their availability, cost, and what funding the employer can access. Remember, many reasonable accommodations cost \$500 or less — and some are even free! ■

Source: University of Alberta Career and Placement Services Tips, and Alberta Human Resources and Employment.

# Emotional Intelligence is Becoming More Important to Employers

In today's economy, it's not always the most qualified candidate who lands the job. Employers are increasingly choosing to hire people who exude high emotional intelligence over those who possess the most experience, says Lisa Caldas Kappesser, author of the new book *The Smart New Way to Get Hired: Use Emotional Intelligence and Land the Right Job*.

Kappesser describes emotional intelligence as a group of four skill sets or competencies that, when used together effectively, can help people achieve their goals, including landing a new job. These four skill sets include:

- ❖ Self-awareness;
- ❖ Self-management;
- ❖ Social awareness; and
- ❖ Social skills.

According to Kappesser, people utilizing these skill sets have a big advantage in the job hunt and in their careers.

"Employers look for emotional intelligence when they hire or promote employees," states Kappesser, president of EQ Coaching Solutions, where she provides quality career and executive coaching services. "They're developing structured interview questions and giving assessments that tap into emotional intelligence, because research has convinced them that such intelligence is a critical part of developing high potential, star performers and leaders."

In her book, Kappesser provides tips for developing emotional intelligence and maximizing it to become a standout job candidate. Her advice includes the following techniques to help candidates excel during interviews:

✓ **Focus on three main points.** Job candidates should pick three points or messages that should be highlighted throughout an interview. Plan how you will get these points across through answers to interview questions.

✓ **Research what the company needs and share how you can meet those needs.** Employers admire candidates who show genuine interest in their company by being knowledgeable.

✓ **Know your "brand."** Job candidates distinguish themselves from other candidates by showing what makes them unique or different. Ask yourself how you want

others to think of you and remember you when you leave the interview.

✓ **Create a good communication dialogue.** Job candidates should keep their answers short, clear, and to the point. Let the interviewer ask for more details. When you don't fully understand a question, ask for clarification. This shows good listening and communication skills.

✓ **Smile and show a sense of humor.** This helps create a positive connection with the interviewer, which can provide an edge over other qualified candidates. ■

*The Smart New Way to Get Hired* is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), major bookstores, and from the publisher ([www.jist.com](http://www.jist.com) or 1.800.648.JIST).

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# What Companies Want From New Hires

Even one poor performer can hurt a company's ability to make strategic plans and attract new business. That's because when companies are operating extremely lean, hiring errors take a greater toll, since each employee is carrying a heavier workload, according to OfficeTeam, an administrative staffing firm.

"Although the high unemployment rate has resulted in more available talent, identifying the strongest candidates remains a tough task," said OfficeTeam Executive Director Robert Hosking.

OfficeTeam offers seven hallmarks of top performers and how to assess those traits:

➤ **A winning mind-set** — The best employees are optimistic yet realistic. Successful candidates can describe how they have handled a difficult boss, budget cut or mistake at work. Strong performers

acknowledge challenges without sugarcoating their answers. Conversely, candidates who can't think of any problems are either wearing rose-colored glasses or they're not being honest.

➤ **Willingness to change** — Persistence is an important trait, but it's even better when combined with adaptability. High-achieving employees don't give up on problems but instead tackle them from multiple angles. A potential hire may be asked how they were able to change something that wasn't working on the job.

➤ **Quickness on their feet** — This is an especially important trait for candidates who work with customers to a large degree. Such applicants may be asked how they would handle an irate customer. The idea is to demonstrate the ability to think on one's feet and give the rationale behind a response.

➤ **An eye on the prize** — Top performers strive for success in

everything they do. Applicants may be asked to describe their greatest work achievement. While the accomplishment itself may be revealing, even more so is how the person characterizes success.

➤ **Ability to make tough calls** — The most valuable employees can be counted on to exercise good judgment and make difficult choices. Potential hires may be asked to "walk" a hiring manager through a complex decision that had to be made.

Hosking also noted, "Many companies are choosing to work with potential new hires on a temporary or project basis before offering them a full-time job. This provides hiring managers with a clearer sense of a professional's capabilities and allows both parties to evaluate the fit before committing for the long term." ■

Source: OfficeTeam ([www.officeteam.com](http://www.officeteam.com)).

## In the News

# ODEP Announces Web-based Initiative

The U.S. Department of Labor recently announced the launch of ePolicyWorks — a collaborative, information-sharing initiative among national policymakers and stakeholders designed to address specific barriers to employment faced by people with disabilities.

Managed by the department's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), ePolicyWorks is an unprecedented effort to tackle critical disability employment issues.

Web-based technology is being

leveraged to facilitate real-time coordination and communication around key policy areas. ODEP plans to focus the initiative into targeted topic areas such as health care, technology and transportation.

The first topic area is ePolicyWorks Health Care, the centerpiece of which is an online collaborative workspace for key stakeholders.

The site incorporates many Web 2.0 features, such as feeds that highlight up-to-the minute news on health care, disability and

employment issues, as well as a board where members can post important notices or messages and a conference room to begin discussion forums.

ePolicyWorks Health Care also incorporates a social networking platform and eWorkgroup capabilities.

Partners in the ePolicyWorks initiative include the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Transportation; the Social Security Administration; and others. ■

Source: ODEP ([www.dol.gov/odep](http://www.dol.gov/odep)).

## Frankie: Funding On-the-Job Supports

**F**rankie is a 21-year-old man who lives in Haworth, OK. His interests include rescuing animals and caring for his 11 dogs. Frankie is also active in his local church and has many friends.

In 2006, right after graduating from high school, Frankie began working full-time at McCurtain Farm Supply and Ranch, a feed store where he and his family were customers. At the feed store, his work duties included stocking merchandise, caring for plants and animals, and assisting customers.

Because of his positive attitude and hard work ethic, Frankie was a valued employee. He received on-the-job supports directly from his employer, who was reimbursed through Oklahoma's *Contracts with Industry* program, an innovative funding practice highlighted in this article.

However, the feed store went out of business in 2008. Upon learning that his job at the feed store was ending, Frankie did not waste any time finding a new job. The City of Idabel's municipal office was located across the street from the feed store, and Frankie often visited to socialize during his lunchtime.

Through some of his friends at the municipal office, Frankie learned of a maintenance job opening. After an interview with the Mayor of Idabel, Michael Shinn, Frankie was hired as a municipal employee for the city, where he still works today.

### What's Important

With the help of Frankie's service coordinator at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) Developmental

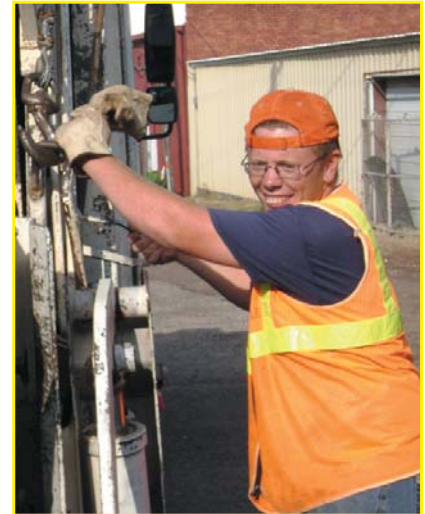
Disabilities Services Division (DDSD), Frankie was able to offer the City of Idabel reimbursement for 12 months of on-the-job supports through the *Contracts with Industry* program. The program allows the DDSD to contract directly with businesses to provide job coaching supports that become a natural part of the workplace.

Frankie's service coordinator and job developer discussed the program with Shinn at Frankie's job interview. Shinn had heard about Frankie's hard work as an employee at the feed store and was willing to employ him at the city through the *Contracts* program.

After Frankie's interview, the job developer worked with the city to review the details of the contract and to designate a city employee to provide the necessary job supports to Frankie. This designated person was instructed on how to tailor supports to meet Frankie's needs and to document the number of hours of support was provided.

Under the contract, the employer was reimbursed at an hourly rate for supports provided to Frankie during his first six months on the job. During Frankie's second six months on the job, the employer was reimbursed at a lower hourly rate. With the help of Frankie's case manager, the City of Idabel filed for their reimbursements through a monthly claim to the Oklahoma Health Care Authority.

Frankie is currently finishing his second six months on the job at the reduced reimbursement rate. Although his supports through the program will soon end, Frankie



will continue in his job with the city.

The *Contracts with Industry* program has been invaluable, as Frankie would have otherwise had to rely on a job coach traveling long distances in their rural setting.

### What Happened

Frankie works from 6:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Since he resides in a rural area, where public transportation is not an option, Frankie is dropped off and picked up from work by his foster mom, who is reimbursed for mileage by the DDSD.

Frankie works in a variety of capacities for the City of Idabel, from collecting trash on residential routes and maintaining vehicles for the police department, to mechanical work and landscaping city-owned properties.

Frankie's duties are a deliberate way to enhance his skills in many different areas. Frankie reports that he is getting to know his job

*continued on Page 7*

responsibilities and that he enjoys working with his supervisor and spends a lot of his hard-earned money on food for his dogs.

### Lessons Learned

■ Contracting directly with an employer for on the job supports was efficient and helped establish supports designed to continue after the reimbursements end.

■ Personal relationships and networks are a powerful tool for identifying employment opportunities. Frankie's experience illustrates the importance of continuing to build relationships beyond the initial job acquisition.

■ Although the *Contracts with Industry* program is a unique funding opportunity in Oklahoma, there are other innovative ways to use funds for creating employment opportunities. For example, the PASS Plan from the Social Security Administration provides funds to purchase job related equipment or to start a small business.

Moreover, Vocational Rehabilitation can be used to purchase skill training, capital equipment, vehicle repairs and insurance, work clothes, adaptive equipment, and computers. Basically, many community rehabilitation programs can use available funds to purchase a wide range of tools, in order to make employment successful. ■

Source: Reprinted with permission from the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston (<http://communityinclusion.org>). For more information, contact Shanna Duncan, OKDHS DDS, McCurtain County, (580) 208-3404, [Shanna.Duncan@okdhs.org](mailto:Shanna.Duncan@okdhs.org).

# NEVER Say These Things in an Interview!

While there are many things for job seekers to learn about expressing themselves effectively in job interviews, there are also some clear “deal breakers” that will almost undoubtedly take candidates out of consideration for employment. They include:

☒ **I don't know anything about your company.** The interviewer will assume you're just after the job, and not a career. Since an effective interview will establish what the applicant can do for the company, a candidate who doesn't know what the company does — and who probably doesn't know what it needs from its workers — won't impress an interviewer.

☒ **No, I don't have any questions for you.** Much like telling the interviewer that you don't know anything about the company, saying you don't have any questions to ask also signals a lack of interest in the employer. It's true that some interviewers do a pretty thorough job addressing an applicant's concerns, but a prepared candidate can probably come up with *something* to ask. This is where researching the organization can really come in handy.

☒ **I hated my last boss.** Your last employer may well have been a rotten person who made your life miserable. But there's a difference between honesty, which is admirable, and trash-talking, which is despicable. Simply state



that your last position was not right for you. Then, explain what type of organization, and management style, is a better fit.

☒ **I'm going to need to take these days off.** A lot of people tend to overlook this no-no. It is fair game to state, *IF* the candidate is offered the job. But before then, the applicant risks appearing as if he/she will get the job.

☒ **How long will it take before I get a promotion?** It's good for a job candidate to appear goal-oriented, but the job seeker must not come across as ready for the next step, when the individual doesn't even have the *initial* job yet! Instead, ask the interviewer to explain a typical career path for the position. Or, ask the interviewer why the position is open. The applicant may gain some insights, but keep them to yourself.

☒ **Which local church do you belong to?** A *little* small talk to establish rapport with an interviewer is acceptable, but don't cross the line into discussions about religious or political affiliations, personal hobbies, etc. Doing so can put both interviewer and applicant in an awkward situation. ■

Source: CareerBuilder ([www.careerbuilder.com](http://www.careerbuilder.com)).

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# AgrAbility Sows Seeds of Confidence



**T**he first seeds of AgrAbility were planted in 1979, when a farmer with severe disabilities asked Purdue University with help to modify his tractor so he could continue farming.

Today, each AgrAbility project is a statewide collaborative partnership between a land-grant university and one or more nonprofits. In 22 of the 27 states that have AgrAbility programs, Goodwill agencies help provide accessible job placements and other services for farmers with disabilities in their hometowns.

Eric Olson, national AgrAbility coordinator for Goodwill Industries International, is conducting outreach to unfunded states that don't currently have AgrAbility projects. Each year, Goodwill will choose three states to establish new programs. Goodwill in Arizona, Maine, and Oregon will be the first to receive training on providing AgrAbility services.

AgrAbility helps agricultural workers with disabilities achieve independence through a variety of means, including technical assistance, peer support networks, and training and education.

For example, one of the highlights of the Minnesota AgrAbility Project (MAP), is a Fence-Line Volunteer Peer Support Network. This is a group of Minnesota farmers and their families who have successfully adapted to challenging situations.

Fence-Liners share their experiences with other farmers with disabilities who have been referred by MAP — both supporting them and helping them find assistive technology solutions.

"I would not be crop and dairy farming today if it hadn't been for AgrAbility," says David Glamm, who walks with a prosthesis due to a silo unloader accident. "The program provided on-farm consultation to see what jobs I perform, and it identified what limitations I might have to do these tasks.

"I was told how to safely accomplish my chores so I wouldn't suffer secondary injuries. And I was helped with choosing modifications and assistive technology," Glamm added. ■

*This article is reprinted with permission from "Working!" a publication of Goodwill Industries International, Inc. ([www.goodwill.org](http://www.goodwill.org)).*

## In the News

# AOTA Joins Growing List of Alliance Partners

**T**he Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA) is pleased to announce that the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) has joined ATIA's alliance partnership program.

As an ATIA alliance partner, AOTA will offer discounted program registration to its members while promoting other ATIA educational programs and conferences.

"Our alliance partners are global leaders in the assistive technology industry, and in choosing to partner with us, AOTA signals its ongoing commitment to providing

enhanced benefits and opportunities to people with disabilities," says David Dikter, Executive Director of ATIA.

"Since the inception of ATIA more than a decade ago," Dikter adds, "our mission has been to ensure access to the best assistive technology services and products — and adding AOTA to our growing list of alliance partners indicates that we are fulfilling that mission."

Assistive Technology (AT) is defined as any item, piece of equipment, product or system — whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized-

that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.

"I believe that collaborative partnerships such as the ATIA-AOTA Alliance, will foster the development of quality assistive technology education, and increase access and opportunities for people with disabilities to use technology for a higher quality of life," said Kimberly Hartmann, Chair of the AOTA Technology Special Interest Section. ■

*Source: Assistive Technology Industry Association ([www.atia.org](http://www.atia.org)).*