

Transitions

by Greg, Gail and Shea Arnold



Shea and Gail Arnold

the world of education and finally the milestone that occurs at ages 21 to 22, when our young adult exits from a controlled environment into the world of adulthood, where parents will be directing the next steps.

Each family's experience will be unique; ours was especially traumatic. Our lives determined that we needed to make a move out of state right after Shea's graduation. At a time with many changes to make, we added leaving friends, support groups, medical teams and state resources. (Avoid if at all possible!!!) We have spent the last year rebuilding this invaluable infrastructure as fast as possible as I now had a very bored, very vocal young adult on my hands 24/7! Shea's days are now filled with volunteering 4 days a week at a child/senior daycare, using the Lift bus for transportation, involvement in the YMCA, Young Life Capernaum and a special needs cheer leading squad. She realizes these are only steps being taken to work out her long term life goals of paid employment and living as independently as possible or as Shea clearly states, out of Mom and Dad's house!

So what can we share with you from our journey? Some of the reflections will be familiar and hopefully some will provide new ideas to consider.

1. Start to plan for this transition early. Use those IEP's to direct your child's experience to fit your family's goals. Shea's goal was to find employment so we did not spend time in a life skills classroom but worked out in the community getting job training and building a resume.

2. Explore all of the resources offered, making note as to when your child will be eligible for services. One

We have been making transitions all of our lives starting with the birth of our special needs babies to the medical intervention that followed, initiation into

important service was a job assessment process and job training through the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation in the state of Washington. I believe all states have a similar department.

3. Set life goals, long and short term, with your young adult. They must be made to feel that the process is working to fulfill their needs and desires. Listen to their hopes and expectations and be open to how they might be achieved even when the word, "impossible", seems real.

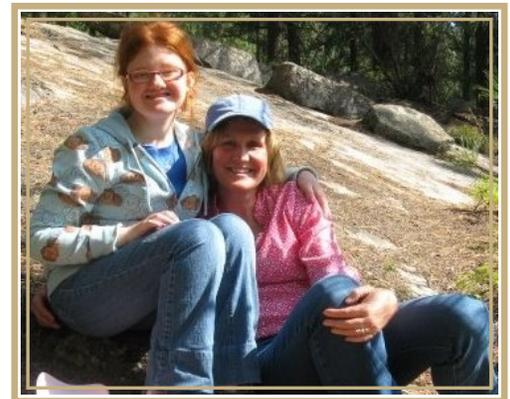
4. Attend a person-centered planning conference if one is available in your area. It is so encouraging to focus on who your child is and what they are accomplishing rather than what they are not and cannot do. At the end a resume is written that emphasizes their unique gifts and skills. I use this resume when looking for employment or volunteer positions in the community.

5. Prepare for a season of emotional upheaval. This was our experience as Shea realizes she has Kabuki Syndrome yet still has the same, but seemingly impossible to attain, dreams for her life that her peer group and siblings are experiencing. Seek mental health care providers and/or medication when your young adult is struggling beyond your help.

6. Remember that uncharted transitions will always be a part of our journey. If you are experiencing a particularly difficult time, put your hope in knowing this season will end and days ahead will be different.

We are in a better place than we were in Fall 2010 but have a long way to go to help Shea live the purposeful life she desires.

We hope this helps and send our support and encouragement to all family's in their journeys ahead.



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