

“Making It in the World:”
Stories of Successful Transition from High School to
Employment in New Hampshire

David Hagner

Kathleen Dowd

Photographs by Sarah Buckovitch

Concord, NH

New Hampshire Developmental Disabilities Council

2005

Preface

This project is a collaborative effort between the Granite State Association for Persons in Supported Employment and the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability. We would like to thank the New Hampshire Developmental Disabilities Council (NHDDC) for their generous support and assistance. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy of the information in this report. If there are any errors, they are solely the responsibility of the authors.

The Granite State APSE is partially funded through a contract with the NHDDC, with funds made available through the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD). Points of view or opinions represented in this material do not necessarily represent official NHDDC or ADD policy.

About the Authors

David Hagner, Ph.D., is Rehabilitation Projects Director with the Institute on Disability and Research Professor at the University of New Hampshire. He is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor with over 20 years experience in teaching, research, evaluation and direct service. He co-directs the New England Regional Continuing Education Program for Community Rehabilitation Personnel and conducts research and demonstration projects in the areas of transition from school to adult life. Dr. Hagner is the author of five books and over 35 chapters, monographs and journal articles related to employment and rehabilitation and is a frequent presenter at regional and national conferences. He serves as Consulting Editor for the journal *Mental Retardation* and chapter president of the Granite State Association for Persons in Supported Employment.

Kathleen Dowd serves as service coordinator for Community Developmental Services in Portsmouth, NH. She previously worked as an aide at Oyster River High School, facilitating achievement of educational plans and developing work placements for students, and as a therapeutic mentor for the Seacoast Mental Health Center. Ms. Dowd has a BA in psychology, with additional graduate coursework in Counseling at the University of New Hampshire.

Sarah Buckovitch graduated from Dover High school in 1997 and is currently employed at the Seacoast Child Development Clinic as an office assistant and child care aide. She previously worked at the Parent Information Center as a cleaner and office assistant. Ms. Buckovitch has studied photography and does freelance photojournalism work, and aspires to a career as a professional photographer. Ms Buckovitch experiences a developmental disability.

“Making It in the World:”

Stories of Successful Transition from High School to Employment in New Hampshire

There is ample evidence that young adults with developmental disabilities who may traditionally have been considered unemployable or only employable in segregated facilities or programs can succeed in a wide range of community jobs. However, positive community employment outcomes are far from the norm. The NH Department of Health and Human Services reports that only about 25% of adults served by the developmental service system are employed in the community. The rest either work in groups or workshop facilities, or spend their time in non-remunerative day activity. Much more needs to be done to advocate for quality career outcomes for adults with developmental disabilities across our state.

Background of the Project

The transition from school to adult life is a critical time for any young adult. When the right supports are in place, a graduating student can embark on a lifelong journey towards a meaningful and rewarding career. Thus, there is a critical need to understand in detail what is involved in successful transition. An important part of this effort is documentation of transition success stories. Stories of successful transition to employment for young adults with developmental disabilities can identify pathways to success that serve as models for others.

In response to a request for proposals from the New Hampshire Developmental Disabilities Council (NHDDC), the Granite State Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE), an organization of individuals interested in promoting quality employment services for individuals with significant disabilities, developed a proposal and

received funding for the project. Collaborating with the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability, we sought to identify four young adults with developmental disabilities who successfully transitioned from high school in New Hampshire to successful employment in a meaningful individual community job. We interviewed the individual, their family, and others who were instrumental in making transition a success, and tell their stories. Concentrating on a small number of individuals allows an in-depth look at the transition process.

We wrote to all of the New Hampshire developmental disabilities service system Area Agency Directors and Family Support Coordinators, the members of the Granite State Association for Persons in Supported Employment, and graduates of the Institute on Disability's Family Leadership Series; and we published a notice in the *New Hampshire Challenge* newspaper. We asked for assistance in locating young adults who might represent good examples of successful transition to employment, and who might be interested in being interviewed and telling their story.

Five individuals were nominated to us in response. One of these was primarily involved in volunteer work, with only very occasional paid employment, and thus did not meet our criteria of employment success. The remaining four individuals were contacted and agreed to participate. The participants, three men and one woman, all in their mid-twenties, were from regionally diverse communities around the state: Manchester, Dover, Conway, and Littleton.

Developing the Stories

We conducted in-person interviews with each person and their family, and then with the high school staff and the adult services staff that the individual and family identified to us as instrumental in their transition. We also interviewed each work supervisor, either in person or

by telephone, and visited each worksite to see the individual with a developmental disability at their job and, with permission, took photographs at the worksites.

Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. A set of open-ended questions (provided as an Appendix) was used to guide each interview, but the interviews were informal and conversational in nature, with opportunities for follow-up questions and additional topics.

All of the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed except for one telephone employer interview, which was recorded by means of notes. In a few cases, we were also provided with documents such as a resume or a vocational evaluation report, to help illustrate something from the interview. The interviews were then combined into four narrative stories. Story drafts were sent to each individual and family for their review, corrections, and approval.

Patrick



Patrick was 23 years old and living in the Conway area at the time of the interviews.

The following individuals were interviewed for this story:

- Patrick,
- Rita, Patrick's mother,
- Victoria, Patrick's employment support person from his developmental services Area Agency,
- Joan, Patrick's former high school special education teacher,
- Jan, Patrick's employer and manager of the Mountain Valley Mall Theater complex.

Education and Transition Planning

Patrick graduated from Kennett High School, in Conway, NH at the age of 21. Prior to moving to the Conway area, Patrick and his family had lived in Massachusetts, where Patrick's high school arranged two work experiences at community businesses for him. One experience was with a company making computer chips and the other was polishing silverware for a hotel.

Patrick was at Kennett High School for two and a half years in all, and Joan was his Special Education Teacher for his last two years. Patrick graduated with a certificate of completion, the day he turned 21. Joan explained that at Kennett students who don't meet the regular education requirements – so many credits of science, so many credits of history, and so on – get a certificate of completion rather than a true high school diploma. Patrick did take a few regular education classes, and Joan remembers that he “did awesome.” She added, “I find that true of all of my students. When I put them in regular education classes, it's amazing how they rise to the occasion.” However, Joan believed that students like Patrick are not able to take enough regular classes to earn a diploma because of limited staffing at the school.

Patrick's high school curriculum had a strong vocational and community experience component. Joan taught a job skills class as part of the high school program, and students in the class who are 18 - 20 years old went out into the community three afternoons per week, doing volunteer work such as setting up for a local soup kitchen, spending time with the residents at a local nursing home, and shopping at the supermarket for the school's culinary department. As part of the class, students received training in resume preparation and other job search skills. Seniors also visited the “New Hampshire Works” employment center sponsored by the Department of Employment Security and became familiar with using the computers at

the center for accessing job openings, and with other services available through the office and through the Vocational Rehabilitation office, located in the same building.

Patrick also had several in-school job preparation experiences during his last two high school years. He distributed the school supplies from the supply room to various classrooms for the teachers. He also had a job filling the soda machines in the school and getting the money out and bringing it to the main office. These experiences provided an opportunity to learn both job skills and important job-related behaviors; for example, honesty in handling money. In the time since Patrick left school, a school-to-career staff position has been established within Kennett High School, devoted to working with businesses in the community to make more work experience opportunities available to students outside the school.

Transition planning for Patrick included referrals to both the Area Agency and the local Vocational Rehabilitation office. Patrick's transition planning was based on a process called Group Action Planning. Joan described the process as follows:

We got together with his mom, the (Area Agency) people, the Voc. Rehab people and Patrick, and we had a sort of informal gathering. It wasn't like an IEP meeting, where everybody is, you know, being really careful about what they are saying. Everybody was relaxed. We had muffins and cookies and juice and stuff. Patrick was really happy about that part. And we all sat around in the teacher's dining room and discussed Patrick's dreams for the future – what he wanted to do, what his mom saw for him in the future, what (the staff supporting him) saw for him – and tried to put them all together to make a plan for him.

Employment Experiences

Based on Patrick's plan and the referrals to adult services, job development began in his last year of high school, and he began a permanent paid job at a local movie theater before he left high school. Patrick's mother Rita feels that by the time he left school to start his job, Patrick was ready for the change, because most of the students his own age had already graduated.

Joan described the process of setting up the job as a collaborative team effort. "When we first got him this job at the theater, we had him go a couple mornings a week from school, and Voc. Rehab. and (the Area Agency) were both in on the training part, and we sent his aide from school."

Patrick began working as a cleaner at the Mountain Valley Mall Theater complex, a job he has held for almost two years. He is responsible for vacuuming and cleaning of the theater in the morning. A job development specialist from the Area Agency, under a contract with Vocational Rehabilitation, met Patrick at school several times to get to know him, then met with the employer and set up the job. Patrick began working two mornings per week while still in school. After he graduated, he progressed to four mornings per week.

And after graduation, responsibility for funding of Patrick's job support shifted to Vocational Rehabilitation, and then to long-term support from the Area Agency once Vocational Rehabilitation services ended.

Victoria picks Patrick up each morning at his home, and provides transportation to and from the job as well as one-on-one assistance to Patrick while he is working. Patrick is entrusted with his own set of keys to the theater, and is in charge of preparing the theater to open each afternoon.

On days when the theater has a matinee, usually during the busier summer season, other employees are coming in to work as Patrick and Victoria are leaving. On other days, they usually do not see other people at work. Another difference in the summer is that theater attendance is so great that Patrick blows the popcorn on the floor to the front of each theater with an electric leaf blower, prior to sweeping it up.

As a job benefit, Patrick has free passes to any of the movies he wants to see, and as an avid moviegoer he takes full advantage of this benefit. His supervisor Jan describes his work as “great.” He has been named Employee of the Month and has seen regular increases in his salary.

Victoria’s role has been to stay as much as possible in the background while Patrick works independently, but remaining available if Patrick needs her. This has allowed Patrick to expand his job responsibilities over time. Patrick initially cleaned only two theaters, but he has steadily progressed to cleaning all seven theaters. Another important expansion was adding the booths where they change the film reels into his vacuuming routine, because the need to keep dust off the films requires particular care in that area.

When asked if he likes his job, Patrick answered “Sometimes its unbearable, but I still do.” He is extremely proud of the money he is earning, and is saving up to purchase a new Play Station. Patrick is also happy to have his own money to use when buying lunch when he is out with his friends. Occasional bad days at work, such as when something goes wrong with the vacuum cleaner, or he is corrected for a mistake like spilling something, can be stressful for Patrick. Victoria has learned to provide cues and prompts when necessary, but also to “step back and count to 10” sometimes as well, to allow Patrick to figure things out for himself.

Patrick's only difficulty with his job has been getting ready on time in the morning. His mother has to leave for her job before Patrick gets up, so she and Victoria developed a plan together to help Patrick be on time. His mother gets his clothes and his morning medication ready and coaches him on his morning routine the night before. This allows Patrick be ready on time the next morning.

Social Relationships and Community Activities

Patrick is involved in a variety of community activities, and has so many connections in the community that when he goes around town on exercise walks with Victoria, Patrick notes that "wherever we go in any part of town everyone knows us. Even the ladies at the bank when I get my money out at the end of the week, they know us." Several of these are close friendships, such as a friend that he meets every Saturday to play in collector card game tournaments.

Patrick keeps in touch with his friends by phone, and is interested in purchasing a computer so that he can communicate more using email. He likes to cook, and is especially interested in Japanese cuisine and culture. He is active in Special Olympics, and recently earned a gold medal in snowshoeing.

Career Advancement and Future Plans

Patrick's mother is convinced that, with the right support from his family and service providers, "If he really pushed himself, like any of us he can make it in the world." Patrick is interested in pursuing a college education, perhaps in a culinary arts program, and has also dreamed of being a singer. For now, Victoria feels that "for Patrick to maintain his job, keep his job from day-to-day, being on time, is a very good area for him to be in right now." His

advancement for the time being consists in completing his job faster, which allows him to take on more responsibility.

Patrick's mother, his special education teacher, and Victoria all agree that for the foreseeable future Patrick will need supportive staff to maintain his job, and that it would be unrealistic for him to live on his own. However, he is gaining increased levels of independence, such as in learning to prepare for work in the morning and be responsible for some of his own purchases in the community. At some point, Joan felt that a move to a different residence might increase Patrick's independence even more.

Transition Recommendations

Patrick recommended that young people embarking on their transition to adult life today be especially careful about staying out of trouble. For example, he felt it was particularly important not to use drugs. He advised that young people listen to their parents, no matter how difficult that may be sometimes. "Oh, one more thing," Patrick added: "Always listen to your boss at your job. Because you can get into a lot of trouble if you don't."

Melanie



Melanie was 24 years old and living in the Manchester area at the time of the interviews. The following individuals were interviewed for this story:

- Melanie,
- Janet, Melanie's mother,
- Jill, coordinator of Melanie's adult service program at Easter Seals,
- Catalina, Resource Coordinator for Melanie's developmental services Area Agency,
- Karen, Melanie's former high school special education teacher,
- Shelley, a manager at Stop and Shop and Melanie's supervisor at her job.

Education and Transition Planning

Melanie attended Goffstown schools until age 15, then transferred to the day school at Crotched Mountain for high school. She was considered to be in ungraded special education classes, and left high school with a certificate of completion at age 21.

Career preparation in high school consisted primarily of exposure to a variety of in-house jobs within the school. Melanie worked in the cafeteria, the day care, and also on several clerical tasks such as collating and paper shredding.

According to her teacher Karen, it was obvious that Melanie was a very social person who seemed to enjoy jobs that offered social interaction. She also preferred the jobs that offered more independence. She seemed to particularly like the day care job, and that became her career focus after high school. Melanie and her mother believe that the training she got in school was very useful in helping her obtain post-school employment.

Melanie also received a formal vocational evaluation during high school. The evaluation recommended “prevocational” services for Melanie, and did not play a role in her post-school decisions.

Melanie enjoyed her high school experience and still occasionally returns to visit some of her teachers. Melanie’s case manager at Crotched Mountain coordinated the transition from school. She invited the Area Agency to meet as part of the transition process, particularly in the last two years of school. A Transition Coordinator at the Area Agency offered information about adult services and attended Melanie’s Individual Education Plan meetings during the transition period.

Employment Experiences

Melanie's mother was told about the services available to them, and during Melanie's last year in school they interviewed several agencies to find out what they had to offer. They chose an organization called TILL (Towards Independent Living and Learning) as the best program for them at the time. It was important to Melanie's mother that "We had a day program in place the day she graduated. Melanie graduated and started her day program the following week."

Melanie's first real paid job after high school was working in the kitchen at the Amherst school district, at two different schools. She stocked milk, made sure that the milk was always full, and filled the utensil bins. Training and support was provided by TILL, with funding from the Area Agency.

Although the Amherst School cafeteria job offered proximity to children, it wasn't really a child care job, so it was just considered temporary. And when it came time to actively pursue employment for Melanie in a job working with children, Melanie and her family found that TILL didn't have much access to other job opportunities, so they switched programs at that point to Easter Seals.

Easter Seals staff found Melanie a job in a day care center in Amherst, but the management was not receptive to making the accommodations Melanie would need to succeed. Despite efforts on the part of Easter Seals to work with the company, they terminated Melanie after her 90-day trial period. Easter Seals then found Melanie another day care job, but after nine months Melanie was terminated from that job as well. After that, she worked at the Easter Seals' day care center but as an unpaid volunteer. There was initially some hope that the volunteer job would turn into a paid position, but this didn't work out.

Melanie then heard that the job development staff at Easter Seals were talking with the management of a new Stop and Shop supermarket about some possible hiring, and she was interested in learning more about it. Jill, the Easter Seals Program Manager, offered her some information and Melanie wanted to apply for one of their openings. So the staff helped Melanie fill out an application, and with help from her family, Melanie put together a professional-looking resume. The manager was impressed with Melanie and she got the job on the spot and started the next day as a bagger.

Melanie began her job with an orientation class called “Computer-Based Training” provided for all new baggers, followed by a “Buddy Bag” period with a more experienced employee for a few days. Shelley, the Stop and Shop supervisor, explained that buddy training is offered “as long as the employee feels they need it, until they can bag on their own, and they know what goes with what.” An important element for Melanie was that her boyfriend also worked at the store and had been through the same training process. Easter Seals staff was also on-hand to assist with Melanie’s initial training period, after obtaining funding for this service from the local Vocational Rehabilitation office.

For the first 4-5 weeks Easter Seals provided a job coach on site, the whole time at first, but then slowly beginning to fading out. For another few weeks the job coach spent less and less time on site, until Melanie was doing well and it was unnecessary to go to the site every day. Jill explained that “What we do now is one to two site checks a week. We just stop in and make sure things are going okay with her, and transportation is always also provided, so we get the chance to see her daily. If she has any issues or concerns, she just brings them up.”

Melanie’s job is about a ten-minute drive from her home. Her job coach provides the transportation both ways.

At the time of the interviews, Melanie had been working at Stop and Shop about three months. She usually works five hours per day, four days per week. Sometimes her schedule changes, but Stop and Shop tries to keep it as consistent as possible, as a job accommodation for Melanie, because changes in her routine can be confusing to Melanie.

Stop and Shop also provides three additional accommodations. First, Melanie is assigned primarily to work with the same cashiers from day to day. Second, part of her job is to get cigarettes asked for by customers, and there are over 100 different kinds, so the cashiers have been asked to write down the names of the cigarettes they need on a piece of paper for her. And Melanie knows that it is OK for her to ask for assistance.

The third accommodation is that due to safety reasons, she cannot go out of the store, so she is only assigned to bagging, not to cart retrieval. The Stop and Shop management is unclear about the reason for this, but they respect the request. Melanie and her mother feel that this is the one company that she has worked for that has been willing to make accommodations.

Shelley, the front-end manager, provides supervision through frequent “bagging audits,” and by being available if Melanie has any questions. Any concerns she may have are either communicated to Melanie directly, or depending on the issue, the manager might notify the Easter Seals staff. A couple of times a month, Easter Seals contacts the Stop and Shop manager to make sure things are OK.

Continuing funding for follow-along job support is received from the Area Agency. Easter Seals is required to send monthly progress notes, and meet at least a couple of times a year with Catalina, Melanie’s Resource Coordinator, to discuss progress. Catalina also meets with Melanie every couple of months, usually over lunch. “It’s an opportunity to get to know one another. The more I get to know my clients, the more I’m able to serve them and provide

for their needs and advocate for them.” She added that “Our goal is to see them integrated into and respected by our society.”

Social Relationships and Community Activities

Melanie’s mother describes her daughter as a “social butterfly,” always on the phone or going to visit friends. She reports that Melanie is involved with “Challenger Sports”, an organization in the Manchester area for children and adults with disabilities, and that through Melanie’s family she is connected to several social clubs and groups. Melanie has had a boyfriend for the past three years, and her family also helps Melanie and Charles with travel arrangements, so they can have opportunities to visit with one another. Because she only works four days a week, on her fifth day Melanie’s job coach picks her up and, along with a few other individuals receiving services from Easter Seals, they go on a community activity such as bowling or to the mall.

Melanie had wanted for some time to get her own computer. So when she started her new job at Stop and Shop, she got a credit card, and recently bought a computer on the credit card. Her mother assists her to budget her money and make the credit card payments. Melanie now has email and several computer games.

Career Advancement and Future Plans

In the short term, Melanie and the staff of Easter Seals are looking for a volunteer position for her so she can use her fifth day of the week more productively. She is interested in working at Meals on Wheels or a food pantry.

As far as other jobs beyond her current position, the Easter Seals Program Manager believes that “When she’s ready for a change, I do believe Mel will vocalize that. I think she has a lot to offer.” The Area Agency Resource Coordinator is optimistic that “She has

unlimited potential. She is so well supported and she has such a desire to succeed. Once she gains experience and becomes comfortable knowing ‘Hey, I’m pretty good at doing this,’ then she has potential to increase her hours, and to do all sorts of things.”

Melanie’s supervisor Shelley is not sure if there are any other jobs at Stop and Shop that Melanie could do, and has no plans that would lead to advancement. Melanie’s restriction on going outside, particularly because Shelley feels she has not been told the reason for it, is given as one of the reasons for this reluctance. She states that “Our baggers have to go outside and get carriages. Melanie is not allowed to do that. I’m not sure exactly the reasons behind that. I’m not sure, you know, if they’d let her do the bakery, because there are lots of ovens. I’m not sure what her capability is.”

At this point, Melanie is happy with her current job and is not thinking in terms of job advancement. Her mother’s primary thoughts about the future are about whether or not it will make sense at some point for Melanie to move out, either on her own or to live with one or more friends.

Transition Recommendations

Melanie herself did not offer any suggestions, but her mother had two important recommendations for transitioning young adults and their families. First, “Get involved with your Area Agency before you turn 18. There are issues you have to deal with before you turn 18.” And second, it is important to obtain job training as part of the high school program. “They need to start to learn how to work independently before they’re out of school.”

Sean



Sean was 24 years old and living in Lee, NH at the time of the interviews. The following individuals were interviewed for this story:

- Sean,
- Sean's mother Bambi,
- Meagan, program coordinator and Jason, service coordinator for Sean's developmental services Area Agency,
- Steve, Sean's former high school special education teacher,
- Ken, Sean's job supervisor and owner of Young's Family Restaurant.

Education and Transition Planning

Sean attended Oyster River High School in Durham. He had been included in many regular classes from an early age right through high school. Because of that, he had a lot of friends in school and was involved in numerous extracurricular activities. He threw the shot-put on the track team, and served for a time as the manager for the basketball team.

The school sets up a transition team when students enter high school, and a transition coordinator begins meeting with the student in their sophomore year. According to Steve, Sean's former teacher, "As they move along to their junior and senior year in high school, the amount of meetings that they have intensifies." The major players for transition were the counselor from the regional Vocational Rehabilitation office and a school liaison from the developmental services Area Agency.

Before he completed high school, Sean obtained work experience through summer programs run by the Dover Vocational Program. For the final two summers before graduating, he spent a half-day in school and the other half-day working on a paid job. This gave him some additional schooling, as well as an opportunity to try out different jobs and work environments.

Sean concentrated in the animal science area at the summer Vocational Program because of his interest in animals, and his summer work experiences were in an SPCA and an animal shelter. Oyster River school provided the transportation and an aide to go with Sean to the program. Sean's mother feels that these early work experiences were very valuable. "His past jobs and volunteer work really helped him to be able to work hard and work through his responsibilities."

However, there was little prospect of paid employment for Sean after graduation in the animal care field. Steve, Sean's teacher, explained that "Most of the work with animals is done

either through volunteer type positions. Or if you're going to work in a vet's office now, they are requiring veterinary assistants, and veterinary assistants programs are very demanding because they require biochemistry and other hard academic subjects. So a lot of kids who are going through the animal science program are finding that it is kind of a dead end for them."

Sean received a regular high school diploma. According to Sean's mother "He actually got 2 diplomas. He graduated with his class. That was a special one. And he got a complete one later at the end when he finished his last classes." Sean went through the graduation ceremony with his peers, but then he returned to school the following year to finish two required classes that he hadn't finished yet. He matched the courses he took with the school's graduation requirements, so he could obtain a standard diploma at age 21.

Several interviewees believed that a vocational assessment was completed in connection with Sean's transition process, but were not aware of what it concluded or recommended. Sean continues to maintain his connections to the school, particularly a continuing involvement with Special Olympics through the school.

Employment Experiences

Sean began working at Young's restaurant in Durham a couple of months before he left school. A school staff member assisting with transition stopped in and, as Ken, Sean's supervisor and the business owner explains it, "She was asking if there was a position available. There was at the time. I felt I'd had the experience with somebody else with special needs, and I think that my style of how I run my business with any employee promotes a working environment for someone like Sean."

So Ken hired Sean, and a school staff person helped with the job training for about two months, until he turned 21 and school eligibility ended. Sean has been working at Young's since that time, about three years at the time of the interviews.

Sean's primary job is dishwashing, but he is also responsible for several additional tasks, such as cardboard recycling and bringing up supplies from storage. He works about six hours a day, three days a week. Another employee with a disability fills that position on the other days.

Sean's Mother drives him to work in the morning, and Sean's supervisor Ken usually drives him home on Fridays. On the other days, Sean either walks the four miles home, when the weather permits, or his father or grandfather or a neighbor give him a ride. Sean would like to be allowed to use a bicycle, but his mother feels there are several busy intersections on the way and that riding a bicycle would be too dangerous.

Once Sean's initial training was complete and high school ended, there has been no formal job support for his dishwashing job. According to his Area Agency Program Manager, "He's pretty well set."

Ken agrees that teaching Sean what he needs to know to do his job has never been a problem. "The key thing is to show him exactly what you need. So if I show him where the jellies are, and tell him when and why I need jellies, or eggs or whatever, he's very capable of doing it." The other important support provided to Sean is "If something changes and it affects his job, you've got to sit down and explain why it's being done and how it's going to be done."

However, there have been some job retention issues that have not been fully resolved. Ken feels that Sean still "needs to work on his hygiene," particularly making sure to come in wearing a clean shirt each day. Sean also reports that he has a problem with getting "Angry

sometimes. Like if people push me too far. Like, some of them are picking on me all the time. Teasing me.” Either Ken or his wife Cathy and Sean’s mother have been Sean’s main source of job support, by trying to provide Sean with an adequate supply of clean shirts to wear to work, and by talking to Sean about how to handle any co-workers – usually younger “kids” who only remain with the employer for a short time – who may not be treating Sean with respect.

It is clear that Young’s Restaurant takes pride in their family atmosphere and support for their employees. Ken explains that “We all need support in our job during the day, and we don’t treat him any differently. Every one of my staff members needs support. This business is all about the people, anyway. If we’re not about people, we’re not about anything. We won’t last long.” Ken feels that Sean not only benefits from the supportive atmosphere at his company, but adds to it. One story is worth quoting in full:

Last Valentines Day, he came in with some flowers for one of the waitresses, Carol. No one told him to do that. He just went out and did it. And you know what Carol said? “You know, I was feeling down. And that made my day.”

For his part, Sean reports that he likes his job, but he is quick to add that “It’s not my favorite place. It’s a job.”

Social Relationships and Community Activities

Sean has an array of leisure and sports interests, from bowling to basketball, soccer, weightlifting, and golf. He also helps his grandfather on his farm, which is next door to his home. Sean has many friends, and acquaintances, but because he lives out in the country, with limited transportation, it has been difficult for him to sustain close friendships.

Sean's program coordinator Meagan explained that Sean receives community support services from the Area Agency. "What we do is help him in the community as far as developing social skills, and we do different social activities. We go bowling on Wednesday nights and that kind of thing. We also help him grocery shop and do cooking skills and everyday living skills." Sean also participates in a monthly self-advocate's group when his schedule permits.

Sean's mother feels that by and large these experiences have been positive, although she wishes there could be more emphasis on teaching useful skills. "They're supposed to be teaching living skills, and they take them shopping a lot, which is not that useful a thing for people who don't have a lot of money. What about teaching them something that would be more useful?"

At home Sean's Mother is helping him transition to greater responsibility. For example, Sean now buys his own food, prepares his own meals, and shares some of the cleaning responsibilities. He also calls and makes arrangement when he needs to ask his grandfather to pick him up after work, rather than his mother making calls for him.

Career Advancement and Future Plans

Sean's mother feels that Sean has not fully achieved all that he wants in a career. "He enjoys the people there, and doesn't seem to mind the hard work. But he would like to work in a music store of some kind. And he would like to learn more about how to cook." Sean agrees that his primary interest is not in dishwashing, but in learning to cook, and beyond that, he has aspirations to work some day in a music store or movie store, or become a photographer. Sean would also like to travel someday, perhaps to visit Hawaii or Miami.

In addition, Sean's mother is hoping that someday Sean can have his own place to live – by himself or with a friend. Ideally, he would like to live closer to town, so he is not so dependent on other people for transportation.

Jason, Sean's Area Agency service coordinator, feels that his current job is satisfactory, and that there are no plans underway to help him investigate other career options, stating that "At this point in time Sean really likes working there." Jason feels that it would be up to Sean to approach the staff and indicate an interest in changing jobs. At that point, a referral to Vocational Rehabilitation could be initiated, and a team meeting held. Vocational Rehabilitation would be asked to provide funds to develop and temporarily support Sean on a new job.

Transition Recommendations

When asked if he has any advice for other young people transitioning from high school to begin their careers, Sean is direct and unhesitating in his recommendation. His advice is to "Find a job that is something you like."

Chris



Chris was 26 years old and living in the Littleton area at the time of the interviews. The following individuals were interviewed for this story:

- Chris,
- Cheryl, his home care provider,
- Edith, his foster mother,
- Brian, his employment service coordinator and Scott, service coordinator for the Littleton office of the developmental services Area Agency,
- Diana, family support coordinator at the Area Agency,
- Lori, Chris' former high school special education teacher,
- Chef Bruce, Chris' supervisor at the Mt. Washington Hotel.

Education and Transition Planning

Chris lived with Edith, his foster mother, from the age of 15 until he was 21 and no longer eligible for foster care. Edith remembers that when Chris first came to live with her he was not able to talk. “He knew what he wanted to tell me, but he just couldn’t get it out. And finally one day he was trying to tell me something, and I told him that I wasn’t going to say another thing to him until I heard words coming out of his mouth. He told me to go to hell.” This determination and perseverance has been a hallmark of Chris’ life ever since.

Chris attended Woodsville High School. In the summer after his second year, he worked in the dining service department of a local hospital, and then the following year, at a McDonald’s restaurant.

For the remainder of his high school years, Chris enrolled at the Riverbend Vocational School in Vermont. By that time, he knew that he wanted to learn to be a chef, and Riverbend was known for its culinary arts program. None of the interviewees could recall if a formal vocational assessment was part of the process, and they agreed that Chris was very clear about his career goal.

Riverbend students are required to try out several different occupational areas, so Chris tried auto mechanics, woodworking, and other areas before he was allowed to settle on the culinary arts program. He spent half of each day in hands-on training at a working restaurant run by the school, and the other half in academic classes at Woodsville. At graduation, Chris received a regular high school diploma. Lori, his teacher at Woodsville, recalls that “The teacher at Riverbend spoke highly of Chris and felt that he had potential there. He wasn’t real fast in the kitchen, but he was very methodical and neat and he took care of everything.”

In preparing for his transition, the high school realized that Chris would need residential support when his eligibility for foster care ended, so they made a referral to the Area Agency. Chris was found eligible just prior to graduation. He began receiving services from the family support coordinator and from the employment staff of the developmental services program in Littleton. A referral was also made to the local Vocational Rehabilitation office, and several transition meetings were held.

Brian, Chris' employment coordinator, remembers that "I met Chris in late April or May. So what I had to work with is 'This guy is going to be graduating in June and he wants a job.'"

What had happened was that Chris had expressed to his teacher an interest in continuing with culinary training after high school, and had heard of the New England Culinary Institute (NECI) in Montpelier VT. So Chris and Lori, his special education teacher, made several trips to the school, starting the November before he was going to graduate. "I knew he could do it, and I wanted them to see him," Lori explained.

The Culinary Institute could see that Chris was eager to attend, but they were not sure he was ready. They informed Chris that they would consider enrolling him after he got a year of restaurant work under his belt.

Chris credits Brian with giving him the assistance he needed to find a job and work successfully for a year so that he could be accepted into the Institute. "I went to college because he helped me get a job in Twin Mountain at Monroe's Family Restaurant," Chris explained.

Based on a personal contact through another staff member's church, Brian found out about the opening for a cook at Monroe's. He brought Chris to fill out an application, and

Chris went in while Brian stopped to help someone change a flat tire. “And when I went in, the next thing I knew Chris was being offered the job,” initially on a trial basis.

At Monroe’s, Chris was first assigned the breakfast team and did well. The kitchen was small and well-organized. Then the manager needed to add him to the lunch shift, and some difficulties surfaced. Brian had to explain to the manager that even though breakfast was actually a more hectic shift than lunch, because of his disability, Chris has difficulty with transitions. He suggested that Chris be assigned to one or the other shift on a consistent basis. Brian arranged with the manager for Chris to spend time only working the lunch shift, and after mastering that menu, the two shifts were combined.

At the end of the year, Chris re-applied to the NECI and was accepted. The Vocational Rehabilitation office assisted with the tuition, as they had agreed at the previous year’s transition meetings, and the Area Agency staff helped work out the personal supports Chris needed. They met with the NECI administration and sent a support person to help him, one day a week. Chris bought a bicycle in Montpelier, and did all of his travel by bike.

The Culinary Institute’s basic certificate program consists of 15 weeks of instruction in residence, followed by six months of internship. Chris arranged to spend three months of his internship at a restaurant in Vero Beach, Florida, and the other three back in New Hampshire. Chris explained that the Area Agency sent a staff person to assist with the initial adjustment. “I had someone come down with me, to see how I was doing. She came back to New Hampshire after I got set up.” Chris’ teacher feels that this internship away from home was an especially valuable experience for Chris’ transition. “He got to see a part of the country he hadn’t seen, and I also think it gave him a great deal of confidence. I think sometimes that’s really good for growing up.”

Employment Experiences

Back in New Hampshire, Chris completed his internship and began looking for permanent employment as a chef. Chris had a variety of seasonal jobs at first. Common Ground staff worked with him on his job interview skills, including arranging videotaped practice interviews with the staff of the local Employment Security office.

Finally, Chris interviewed for and got a job as prep cook at the Ski Lodge at Bretton Woods in Bartlett, NH. Chris recalls that “They hired me on the spot.” For the past three years he has worked at Bretton Woods during the busy season, and then he switched to the Mount Washington Hotel for the summer. Both facilities are owned by the same company. At the time of the interviews, Chris was working about 20 hours a week in the employee cafeteria of the Mount Washington Hotel. During the peak season, though, he works between 40 and 60 hours per week. The change from one facility to the other can be difficult for Chris, because the two restaurants are run very differently, and there is typically a down-time after the fall foliage season and again during the spring “mud season”. Brian tried to encourage Chris to just stay at the hotel, rather than bouncing back and forth. Chris initially wanted to work both jobs, but recently he has decided to stay at the hotel year-round, to avoid the seasonal lay-offs.

Chef Bruce provides essentially the same supervision to Chris as to his other employees. “Sometimes you have to repeat directions 2 or 3 times,” he explained, “But you have to repeat them 2 or 3 times for me too sometimes.”

In the employee cafeteria, Chris prepares cold food for lunch or hot entrée items for dinner, served cafeteria-style. He gets along well with his coworkers, and receives positive performance evaluations. As his former teacher Lori put it, “I know a lot of students who have jobs, but he’s got a real career.” Cheryl, Chris’ home care provider, feels that teamwork made

it possible. “I think what worked so great for Chris, is that everyone involved was working in the same direction. And even though high school ended, everything else picked right up.”

Social Relationships and Community Activities

Initially after returning from Florida, Chris had been living with his grandparents, but when he found work in the White Mountains area, Common Ground contracted with Cheryl to be a family care provider for Chris. Chris continues to keep in touch with his family as much as possible, often visiting his grandparents, his brother, or his nephew on his days off from work.

Because getting around without a car is so difficult in the North Country, Chris wanted to obtain his driver’s license, but he found the written test very difficult. So Brian and another staff member worked with him to help him prepare. “We found that Chris knew the answer,” Brian explained, “But he didn’t know how to translate that answer into a multiple choice answer. So we sort of trained him to ‘read the question, come up with the answer in your head without looking at the answers, then find the answer on the page’.” Chris finally passed the test and purchased a vehicle. Brian feels that with the drivers’ license, as with his career, “His personal determination really drove everything.”

Other leisure activities Chris enjoys include watching movies and playing video games, and he has developed an interest in biking in the summertime with a friend. And of course he occasionally enjoys cooking at home. According to Cheryl, he is famous for his banana bread. “Everybody asks for his banana bread. Even at work they send him home with bananas so he can make his banana bread.”

Career Advancement and Future Plans

Chris' ultimate goal is to be a chef and own his own restaurant. He is working on saving enough money to be able to afford to return to the New England Culinary Institute and take their advanced, two-year program. He has also talked about possibly studying cooking at a school in France. The staff of Common Ground are helping him save for his tuition expenses, and they have also tried to encourage him to think about less expensive options to reach his goals, such as designing his own apprenticeship program with another chef. Chris' current thinking is that if he can afford it, an advanced certificate from NECI would be the best way to go.

Chris' current supervisor is fairly candid in stating that he is not sure that Chris could handle all of the pressures and complexities of running a restaurant. But he is quick to add that he could be wrong. And because Chris has proven people wrong many times before, Brian feels that "If he wants to do it, I can see him doing it."

Transition Recommendations

Chris' advice for young people today who are leaving high school and starting to think about their careers is to tell them "If you have an idea, go after it, and stick with it." His own experience exemplifies this advice. As Cheryl noted, "If he sets his mind on something, you don't bend his mind at all. He's focused and that's what he does. He goes for what he's after."

Chris also recommends trying something out first, because otherwise, it's not easy to tell whether something is right for you. Then, "If you don't like it, at least you tried it."

Discussion

Catalina, Melanie's Area Agency resource coordinator, noted in her interview that "The fear factor is always a big issue with all of our clients, taking that first step. Part of our job is to encourage families and clients that it's OK to take that step because we're going to be right there with them." These four stories of transition are examples of how individuals with developmental disabilities have taken that step and begun, as Patrick's mother Rita put it, to "make it in the world," with a combination of personal determination and support from family, teachers, employers and service providers.

The employers interviewed were remarkably supportive and accommodating. They viewed their support as nothing more than a natural part of doing business, and they viewed their employees with developmental disabilities as contributing to their businesses in significant ways.

It is not possible to estimate, from this small number of transition stories, how prevalent successful transition from high school to employment may be in New Hampshire for individuals with developmental disabilities. Anecdotal evidence indicates that last-minute attention to transition programming on the part of high schools, long Area Agency waiting lists, and other service system factors, combined with the difficulties young adults face locating suitable employment and getting transportation to work, make these stories the exception, when they ought to be the rule.

Common Threads in Successful Transition

It was clear that schools and adult services worked in collaboration, including close collaboration with families, to achieve the employment outcomes reported in these interviews,

and that comprehensive transition planning had begun in the early years of high school. Some common threads in transition programming were evident in all four stories.

School-sponsored employment preparation. The young adults we interviewed had been provided with a variety of school-based and community-based work experiences while in high school. Often these were combined with other aspects of a job preparation curriculum, such as job seeking skills training and field trips to community agencies that help with employment. Two of the four employees began their jobs while still in school, ensuring a smooth transition as the funding for vocational services shifted from the school districts to adult service agencies.

Listening to the person's goals. In charting the course from high school to adult life, the organizations providing transition services paid close attention to and largely took their direction from the individual and the family. The use of Group Action Planning for Patrick, a person-centered planning technique originally developed by the Beach Center at the University of Kansas, is a prime example. The relaxed, informal atmosphere and pace of person-centered planning has a way of empowering the person and their family to think expansively about the future. The use of person-centered planning approaches in transition is growing rapidly, and has enormous potential.

Melanie and her mother were able to “shop around” and select the adult service provider that best met her needs and to change providers when they wished. As another example of listening to the person, all of the staff involved with Chris took Chris’ desire to attend postsecondary school and become a chef seriously. It is easy to imagine less dedicated and less courageous professionals viewing this goal as unrealistic for an individual who just a few years earlier had been essentially nonverbal.

Formal vocational evaluations did not appear to play much of a role in the transition stories reported here. Most interviewees were unaware of whether one had been conducted, and if so, what it concluded. And the one evaluation reported to us, for Melanie, underestimated her potential and was not used for decision-making.

Providing job development and job support services. Employees and employers alike valued the assistance they had been provided in job matching and assisting with training and support. The amount of ongoing support varied from almost nothing, in the case of Sean, to continual presence of an employment specialist for Patrick. Yet in each case the amount and frequency seemed to have been negotiated collaboratively, and for the most part, employment service providers were aware of their two-part responsibility to remain available when needed, and in the background when not needed.

Interagency collaboration. Transition planning for all four employees began several years prior to the end of high school, and included all of the parties that needed to be involved to ensure success. Funding shifted smoothly and in a planned manner in each case, from the school to the local Vocational Rehabilitation office and then to the local Area Agency. In the case of Chris, the arrangement whereby Vocational Rehabilitation funded his NECI tuition, while the Area Agency sent a staff person to Vermont and then to Florida to ensure that he was able to complete the program, is an excellent example of a collaboration involving simultaneous co-funding. As another form of collaboration, in two of the transition stories, transitioning students took advantage of services available at the local Employment Security office.

Recommendations and Future Directions

The ingredients of successful transition do not seem to be “rocket science,” but simple attention to the adequate preparation of students for adulthood and support in selecting and pursuing career goals. The stories of transition reported here highlight these ingredients, and can serve as models for improving transition services for others. But even the best examples are often imperfect. Based on the interview data, two areas in particular can be identified that may warrant increased attention as we strive towards continual improvement of transition services.

Graduation and school vocational programming. Students attending public school are aware that most of their peers tend to go to high school for about four years, and the best transition scenarios seem to be those in which the high school is able to think creatively about what constitutes an appropriate education during the remaining years of eligibility for special education. Sean’s teacher summed up the difficulty well:

I think at the very end when all those kids had already graduated, Sean was feeling much more isolated because he was in high school with kids who he didn’t really know at that point. He had a lot more difficulty in those years at the end because all of the people that he had known had already left. I think that’s something we need to keep in mind for these kids. He had been in this school for almost 6 years. That’s a long time, and he had reached the point where it was time to move on.

Patrick was also ready to leave high school after four years. Because students are usually eligible for special education until they are 21 years old, one option in situations like this would be to treat special education beyond the fourth year of high school as an opportunity for school-funded and school-supported vocational training in the community. This change from the traditional curriculum would embody the principles of “real world learning” that have

become an important new focus of attention nationally and are a special statewide emphasis of the New Hampshire Department of Education. Making sure that credits toward graduation in required subjects can be attached to work-based learning would give more students the option of graduating with a high school diploma.

Job satisfaction and career advancement. Many of the employment service providers seemed too willing to maintain the status quo of an entry-level job that most people, including most of the individuals we interviewed, regard as only a temporary stepping-stone to a real career. Efforts were made to help employees advance within their job, but only in Chris' case was there mention of active steps to also think about his future beyond his current job. Melanie reported liking her job, but it should be remembered that she took it as a last resort, as a welcome change from a long period of unemployment and failure in her original career field. With apparently no systematic assistance to re-think a positive career plan, she is happy to have something stable.

Both Sean and Patrick were clear that they had other career aspirations, and that they were not thrilled with the prospect of keeping their current jobs indefinitely. Patrick's job in particular appears to be fairly isolated, with very little prospect of transferring any of his job support to natural company resources. It may be that the consumers interviewed expressed something different in our interviews than they were expressing to their service providers. Perhaps the onset of their dissatisfaction was fairly recent. But the interviews seemed to show service providers taking little responsibility for checking on job satisfaction or offering opportunities for further career planning and job development. Job change and career growth are a predictable and natural part of young adulthood. Thus, it would seem that positive

attention to job change and job growth would be an expected component of services for young adults.

An in-depth presentation of selected stories of transition can uncover a wealth of information for discussion and analysis. The knowledge that good educational programming and timely initiation of adult services not only can but does result in individuals with developmental disabilities obtaining meaningful employment upon graduation is reason for optimism. What some individuals can accomplish can be repeated for many more individuals. And there are areas of improvement in transition services that can be considered as well. If we continue in our efforts, the next time the New Hampshire Developmental Disabilities Council or some other organization seeks to find good examples of successful transition in New Hampshire, they will be flooded with nominations.

Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Questions Young Adult

Could you tell me about your job?

How did you find your job? Was there anyone who helped you with that?

What do you like about your job?

What things do you wish were better about your job?

How did you learn your job? Was there anyone who helped you with that?

Do you know some of the other people at your job? How do you feel about them?

Do you ever have any problems that you need help with on your job? Who helps you?

What do you usually do when you have free time, like on days off from work? Do you enjoy that?

What other things do you do in the community?

Do you have further goals that you want to achieve in the future? What are they?

Do you have any advice for young people today who are leaving high school and starting to think about their careers?

Is there anything else you want to add?

Thank you.

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions
Family Member or Residential Caregiver**

How do you feel about your (son/daughter's*) transition from high school to adult life so far?

Looking back on it, how good a job did your son/daughter's high school do in preparing for the transition?

How did your son/daughter exit high school? Does he/she have a high school diploma?

Who were the people who were instrumental in helping with transition to employment?

What was your involvement?

What agencies or services did your son/daughter apply for? If so, what was your experience with those services?

How does your son/daughter like his/her job?

Have there been any difficulties in getting and keeping a job? If so, how were those handled?

Do you have any contact with your son/daughter's employer?

How do you feel about your son/daughter's current social relationships and community activities?

What are your goals for the future for your son/daughter?

Is there anything else you want to add?

Thank you.

** or substitute "brother" or individual's name as appropriate*

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions
Work Supervisor / Employer**

How is (the employee) doing at work? What is his/her job?

How was the initial hiring decision made?

Was there any particular training needed at first? If so, can you tell me a little about the training?

What sort of supervision do you feel works best?

How does (the employee) get along with the other workers here?

Do you have any involvement with a support agency that is helping (the employee)? If so, what has been your experience with them?

What is your feeling about what (the employee) might be doing in the future?

Is there anything else you want to add?

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions
Vocational Service Staff Member**

How did (the employee) wind up getting this job? Can you tell me about the job development that went into it?

Were there other jobs or job try-outs before this one?

Were there any vocational assessments?

Was training needed for this job? What was your involvement in the training?

How much interaction do you have now with the employer? What sort of issues come up?

Did you have any involvement with (the employee's) school and school staff prior to graduation?

Did you or do you have any involvement or funding from Vocational Rehabilitation? How involved were or are they?

Did you or do you have any involvement with the Area Agency for Developmental Services? What is or was that like?

Can you foresee further career advancement for the employee, beyond this job? What is your role in working towards that?

Is there anything else you want to add?

Thank you.

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions
Person Who Coordinated School Transition**

What did you do to assist with the student's transition?

Was a vocational assessment done? Did the student have a particular career objective?

What other career preparation activities were part of the student's curriculum in school? (e.g. job shadows, work experiences, job seeking skill class...) Which ones do you think were important for this student?

Were referrals made to adult services as part of the transition process? Which ones and when?

Did the student exit school through regular graduation with a diploma, or in some other way?

Is there anything else you want to add?

Thank you.