



Utah Parent Center
Special needs, extraordinary potential

Getting Involved in the Community

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Alice volunteers every Tuesday and Thursday afternoons at the local food shelf. At the food shelf, she works with other volunteers to stock food and to bag food for people using the food shelf. Alice looks forward to her afternoons at the food shelf because she has many friends among the other volunteers.

She likes to spend time with her friends there; they laugh and tell stories and talk, and Alice says she likes knowing that she is helping others. At the food shelf, Alice met Laura and Peter Buck, an older couple who also volunteer on Tuesdays. Alice became good friends with the Bucks, and she often goes to their house for dinner and occasionally helps to take care of their dog.

Alice's volunteer job has helped her learn responsibility because her coworkers depend on her being there, but she has also expanded her circle of friends. She says she doesn't think she'll ever stop volunteering at the food shelf!

Transition Tips: Planning for Your Child's Future

The transition your son or daughter will make from being a child to being an adult member of the community is a long journey. This journey can be difficult for anyone, but for your child with disabilities, determining where to go, the best way to arrive there, and then completing the journey can be especially challenging. This is why it is so important for you to think about, as early as possible, the important transitions your child will need to make and to develop a plan. Take the ideas in this handout to your Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting when you start talking about transition. This handout may help your IEP team generate other ideas about the transition to adulthood that apply specifically to your child.

With your encouragement and careful planning, you can help pave the way for your child to go where he or she wants to go!

Community Participation

As you consider your child's journey to becoming an adult member of the community, it is really important to think about ways that your child can be actively involved in local activities.

There are many important reasons for supporting your child's involvement in the community. It can be a source of strength and satisfaction for everyone. Community participation is important for children with disabilities because it helps to build a sense of confidence and inclusion, and it is a great way to make friends.

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If you can help your child with disabilities to become actively involved in the community, as an adult he or she will be able to develop and maintain a strong support network and make friends while getting satisfaction out of knowing that he or she is helping to make the community better.

Explore Your Options

It may be overwhelming to think about your child trying to find new activities in the community after high school. But remember that many groups and programs that your child is already interested in will carry over to the community.

If your child currently participates in the school's choir or band, he or she could easily join a local community choir or religious singing group. A teenager who loves to exercise could join a neighborhood walking or hiking club. School organizations, such as Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD), often have local chapters that people can join after high school. By writing these activities into your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) as opportunities to build community, you are helping your child establish connections to similar community-based adult organizations.

You can also help your child think about different options by discussing the interests of family members. Your sister who takes pottery classes may be willing to bring your child along. An uncle who gives out water at the city's marathon every year may be able to include your child next year. Anything you are involved in can give your child opportunities to explore.

Find out about community resources that are available, such as:

- Youth organizations, including scouts or campfire clubs
- Community theater or arts centers
- Movie theaters
- Museums and art galleries
- Recreation and community centers
- Churches, synagogues, and other places of worship
- Libraries
- Golf courses, ball fields, and other athletic centers
- Public parks and trails
- Community education programs

Volunteering is a terrific way to participate in the community. Places that your child might volunteer include:

- Food shelves
- Park and recreation centers
- Youth recreation programs
- Nonprofit organizations
- Schools
- Hospitals
- Retirement homes
- Humane Society
- Adopt-a-Highway
- One-time events, such as the AIDS Ride, MS Walk, or other fundraisers

Set Your Destination and Map a Course

You and your son or daughter should decide which kinds of activities are important for your child's development and self-esteem and which are important to the community.

There is no need to pick only one activity-some youth can be involved in many recreation, educational, and volunteer organizations. Some activities can be done once a month, others once a week, and some twice a year! You and your son or daughter can discuss how often he or she wants to participate in each activity.

If your child has decided that attending movies is the best community activity, think creatively. Even though your child could see movies alone, try to work out plans where he or she goes with a group of friends. Help them figure out transportation and movie schedules. Or even better, ask your child to write a critique of the movie and find out if a local organization will run the review in their newsletter. These are ways to turn an interest into real skills and social experiences.

If your son or daughter wants to try something new, help him or her connect with other people who want to try it or already do it. It is sometimes hard to volunteer at a place with no familiar faces.

Another possibility is for you to volunteer with your son or daughter. The best way for a child to learn community involvement is for a parent to be an active community member.

Once your son or daughter starts volunteering or participating in group activities, it will be easy for him or her to find other activities in which to be involved.

Resources That Will Help You Reach Your Goals

If you are looking for places to help you get started, here are some examples of community organizations:

- YMCA
- Red Cross
- Habitat for Humanity
- Amnesty International
- City community education programs
- City parks and recreation programs
- State parks and recreation programs
- Humane Society
- Children's theaters
- Meals on Wheels

COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS SERVING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES:

Many community education programs in Utah offer lifelong learning for people with disabilities. These programs can provide classes on your areas of interest such as cooking, sports, money management, art, drama, music, computers, and a variety of other activities.

Contact your local school district and ask for the community education coordinator.

OTHER RESOURCES

UTAH PARENT CENTER

801-272-1051 or 800-468-1160

www.utahparentcenter.org

Contact for a list of disability-specific organizations.

DISABILITY LAW CENTER

801-363-1347 or 800-662-9080

www.disabilitylawcenter.org

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

801-538-7500

www.schools.utah.gov

The **Social Security Administration (SSA, Federal Government)** offers programs that pay benefits to persons with disabilities. **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** pays monthly benefits based on financial need to persons who have disabilities and have limited income and resources. This financial support can be very helpful as youth with disabilities transition from school to adult life. Receiving SSI provides you with health insurance.

For more information or to apply for SSI, call (800) 772-1213 (voice) or (800) 325-0778 (TTY) or visit www.ssa.gov/disability/.

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