

Hopes, Wishes, and Dreams

It has been said that the best way to address the needs of a person with disabilities is by trying to provide the life he or she wants—in other words to center the process on the hopes wishes and dreams of the person receiving the services.

We all value our liberty and the freedom to accomplish our dreams. Youth and adults with disabilities are no different. Their dreams are important to them.

Families generally know more than anyone else about a young person's dreams. It is vitally important to believe that your young person **CAN** accomplish his or her dreams. Some questions parents might ask themselves and their youth are:

- What are the dreams? If an individual is non-verbal, opinions can be expressed in smiles, words, art, music, pictures, or with assistive technology.
- Why does he or she want that dream?
- Is there a part of this dream that can bring a sense of accomplishment?
- Are there other dreams that are similar?
- Is the dream achievable? If not, don't tell your son or daughter that it isn't, but help him or her research and learn more about it and possible alternatives that might work.
- What supports are needed?



Tips for Parents

- Youth should not be restricted by having to choose only from jobs they already know about. The wider their exposure, whether job-related or not, the more likely they are to discover something they love.
- When exposing your youth to different experiences, notice what seems to resonate. Point out those activities that might be part of a job, hobby, pastime, or independent living activity. Nurture the youth's interests.

- Keep an open mind when your son or daughter expresses an interest. There may be many different ways to approach whatever it is that draws your youth to a particular dream.
- Find out how others have used innovative approaches and invented the life that an individual dreamed of.
- Talk to your youth about the many different options that are possible.
- Support youth in finding a purpose in life and accomplishing something worthwhile, helpful, or finding a way to make the world better, even in small ways. For all of us, this can give great meaning and bring satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. Help your youth notice feelings of satisfaction or accomplishment.



- Give youth opportunities to help others and then help them recognize how they helped. Let youth choose what kinds of service to perform. Volunteering can provide opportunities to learn what they like and also to develop social connections.

- Encourage involvement in community programs. They are valuable sources of learning about what youth like and what their strengths are. Community programs can also be considered sources of long-term life enrichment enjoyment and support. For example, several agencies and non-profits have boards or committees that include youth and adults with disabilities.

- There are a number of tools available to help find out a person's dream. A good place to start is to talk to your youth's school team to see if your school or school district has such tools available. This activity could be chosen as an IEP goal.

- Remember the youth is the key decision-maker on the team from choosing who is on the team to decide what the team's goals are.
- Believe your youth CAN accomplish his or her dream with support and planning. Be willing to include a discussion about that dream on the agenda.
- Remember that a vision for the future is very personal, and great things can happen if we are open to a person's dreams.
- Customize. One-size-fits-all programs do not always work. Not everyone is happy working at the local grocery store. One youth refused to attend her postsecondary program because the program would

send her to work at places that she hated. She wanted to work in the automotive industry. Once they placed her with Jiffy Lube she happily attended every day.

- Provide whatever support is needed for your youth to communicate his or her decisions to you and to the team. Some youth need support with learning this skill as part of their IEP services. Many youth can benefit from various kinds of assistive technology that help with communication. You may wish to involve your school district's assistive technology team or contact the Utah Center for Assistive Technology for more information.
- Help your family member notice when he or she has been listened to and when his or her goals are achieved. Encourage a celebration of even small accomplishments

Resources:

- A free interest inventory that can be printed out: <https://www.mynextmove.org/explore/ip>
- Workbook for youth that helps them to learn about themselves and their wishes and prepare to participate in person-centered planning: <https://mn.gov/mnddc/extra/publications/Its-My-Choice.pdf>
- Article on people with developmental disabilities daring to dream of services outside the box of what social services agencies typically provide: https://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/exc_011909.shtml
- Utah Parent Center set of videos on success stories and innovative ideas on housing, recreation, transportation, employment and more: <https://utahparentcenter.org/meeting-the-needs-of-adults-with-disabilities/>
- Two Utah Parent Center videos on Self-Determination. The top one tells the story of Julie who has Down Syndrome and how she achieved her out-of-the-box dreams for employment and living independently in an apartment: <https://utahparentcenter.org/resources/self-determination/>
- For more information on the use of assistive technology to communicate: <https://jobs.utah.gov/usor/vr/services/ucat.html>