

Family Mentor Project - Supporting Individuals with Developmental Disabilities and Their Families as They Transition to the Community

<http://www.familymentorproject.info/resources.html>

Education & Transition Planning

Regardless of disability, there are opportunities and expectations for your child to work and participate fully in your community. Your own advocacy, as well as your child's self-advocacy, will be essential to maximizing and developing these and other resources.

Like any successful journey, planning is everything. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, your child is entitled to receive special education services until age 21. The advantages of taking this path of staying in school include additional training to be job ready and three additional years of education and support. If your son or daughter leaves school at age 18, he or she is not eligible for any potential long term job support until age 21.

Transition planning should begin as early as possible, but at least by age 16. At this time, parents should be asking to have employment goals integrated into your child's individual educational program. This would be a good time to become actively involved with your student's IEP transition plan. You may want to contact your county DD office about resources available to connect you to your community now and in the future. Look in the blue pages of your phone book under County Government.

Think of this time as a train to catch rather than a stop along the road. There's a lot of territory to cover, so be ready to roll. Don't stand on the tracks waiting for the next ride. When special education services end, many parents feel as though they've been run over by a train they didn't see coming.

It's a sobering reality, for sure, but there are definite steps to take, resources available, and opportunities for you and your child to hone your advocacy skills.

As your child's transition plan is developed, be sure that he or she is an integral part of the process. Learning how to speak up, plan and take risks will help your child become more independent and successful after high school.

Identifying career interests and skills is the focus of your child's transition years, as well as learning independent living skills, such as shopping, cooking, budgeting and using the bus system. Make the most of staff and educators during this time.

Additional services will be available to your child when he or she turns 18, but they are not easy to track down. You should be contacted prior to your child's 18th birthday to review his or her eligibility. The good news is that, as an adult, eligibility will be based on their income, not yours.

Services and Resources

When your child is between the ages of 16 to 21 there will be a lot of child to adulthood transitions you will need to make to ensure that your child is connected to the adult service systems that he or she may need. Systems you may interact with include:

- [Social Security](#)
- [Washington State Division of Developmental Disabilities](#)
- [Post-Secondary Education](#)
- [Other services and resources](#)

SOCIAL SECURITY

Before your child becomes an adult at age 18, contact the Social Security Administration about disability benefits. Eligibility for financial assistance with supplemental security income, known as S.S.I., is the gateway to additional services, such as Medicaid.

Contact the Social Security Administration for more information and to apply for social security disability benefits once your son or daughter becomes an adult. Call toll-free 1-800-772-1213 or visit online at <http://www.ssa.gov/>. After applying, be sure to call the Social Security Administration monthly to follow up. They will not call you if there are problems with the application.

Anyone eligible for S.S.I. is also entitled to receive Medicaid services. Medicaid provides health coverage, vision and some dental care. It also entitles eligible individuals to in-home care known as Medicaid Personal Care. It provides assistance with activities of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, eating, meal preparation and housework.

WASHINGTON STATE DIVISION OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

If your son or daughter is already receiving services through the Division of Developmental Disabilities, he or she may already be receiving Medicaid Personal Care, known as M.P.C. If not, ask your case manager for a DDD assessment. M.P.C. can be provided in your own home by individual or agency providers who are contracted with the state. As a parent, you can also become an M.P.C. provider for your adult child. Contact your child's case manager for more information about M.P.C.

If your child is not an eligible client of D.D.D., look in the state government blue pages of your phone book for a D.D.D. regional office near you, and ask to speak to someone about intake and eligibility. If your child is not eligible for D.D.D., look in the state government blue pages for your local community services office to find out about eligibility for Medicaid and other Department of Social and Health Services.

Respite, therapies, home modifications and other services may be available to you through D.D.D.'s Family Support Program. These services are provided to individuals who are living with their families, but there is a waiting list.

The division provides services for community-based supported living, companion home; group home and state operated living alternatives (or SOLAS). They are offered through four different home and community-based waivers, but enrollment is limited.

There are thousands of people waiting for family support and waiver services such as employment and day programs. A waiver is an agreement to receive services in your own community rather than a state institution. Ask to have your child added to the "waiver enrollment database" and/or "family support waiting list" as soon as possible.

Other out-of-home services include adult family homes and state-run residential habilitation centers. Adult family homes provide personal care and supervision in a licensed setting, but no habilitation or support to access the community. Residential habilitation centers are state-operated institutions founded before community alternatives were developed.

POST SECONDARY EDUCATION

Post-secondary education builds self-esteem, creates community connections, and improves changes for employment. Most local colleges and universities offer a variety of classes for students with disabilities. Contact your local college or university for information and assistance.

Think College! Unites school systems with colleges to offer dual enrollment options for high school transition. Washington State has four participating **Think College!** Programs. Learn more at www.thinkcollege.net.

OTHER SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Other local resources to look for include local Arc chapters or activities and services available through the local parks and recreation department.

Local Arc chapters are active throughout the state. They provide information and referral, as well as advocacy. To find out if there's an Arc near you, look in your local phone book or visit the Arc of Washington State website at <http://www.arcwa.org/> for a listing of local Arcs.

Local parks and recreation departments administered by the county or city you live in offer many activities, such as Special Olympics or other community opportunities from bus tours to ballgames and classes. Look in the blue pages of your phone book for more details or call your local city or county information line. A local community college is another great resource to explore for personal enrichment and education.

Advocacy & Self-Advocacy

Advocacy

Because the waiting lists for services are so long, it's important to get involved with advocacy efforts to meet the needs of the unserved. Parent coalitions help improve the service system by advocating with a unified voice. Contact the Arc of Washington State to find out if there's a parent coalition near you. Call toll-free 1-888-754-8798 or visit <http://www.arcwa.org/>.

Until now, you have been the only person speaking for your child. Now that he or she is either reaching or has already entered adulthood, it's especially important for his or her voice to be heard.

Self-Advocacy

People First of Washington and Self Advocates of Washington promote self-advocacy in all areas of a person's life. In many parts of the state, they are creating self-advocacy chapters in high schools. For more information, call People First toll-free at 1-800-758-1123. In Pierce and Kitsap counties, contact Self Advocates of Washington at 1-253-597-3709.

Self-Advocates in Leadership, known as SAIL, also offers many opportunities for people with developmental disabilities to shape the services and policies that affect their lives. For more information about SAIL, contact the Arc of Washington State at 1-888-754-8798 or visit <http://www.sailcoalition.org/>.

Overview: Ages 21 to 40

Whether you're just beginning to get a sense of the adult service system or you're well-traveled and somewhat weary, the need for information remains constant. Chances are your son or daughter is living in your family home. If not, he or she is still very much a part of your life and it's important to stay informed about changes in programs and eligibility requirements.

It goes without saying, but is worth reinforcing: involve your son or daughter in all aspects of planning and decision-making about his or her life. Support your adult child in making choices, gaining independence, being involved in your local community and continuing to develop goals that reflect his or her interests and strengths.

The good news is that since turning 18, your son or daughter's income is used to determine financial eligibility for publicly funded health care, personal care, vision services, durable medical equipment, some dental care and other income-based services, such as supplemental security income and food stamps.

Overview: Ages 40+

As your son or daughter gets older, you're faced with a complex set of issues, concerns and emotions to navigate. No longer are your adult child's needs the only ones to consider. As you age, your needs are changing too.

Planning for a time when you are no longer there to support your son or daughter can feel so overwhelming, you may feel like putting it off. Just know that those who do plan for the future feel better for having done so.

As you move through this guide, find what feels comfortable to you and begin with that. For many families, just getting help to sort through social security benefits is a big step. With your retirement, death or disability, your son or daughter will be eligible to receive benefits from your social security income as a disabled adult child, known as DAC.

If you do nothing else right now, listen to the options available to you and your adult child and consider connecting with other families who face similar concerns and issues.