



From High School to Adult Life: The College Campus Experience

— by Brogan McCabe

Are you planning for your child's future? College is an opportunity for all young people to grow and develop the skills needed for independent living and future success — and young adults with special needs are no exception.

Young Adult Life Transitions (YALT) is a program for young adults with developmental disabilities who wish to continue their education past high school. YALT is a program of People Inc., Western New York's leading non-profit human service agency. The innovative program provides students the chance to experience life on a college campus alongside their peers. The participants can achieve their goals with the help of dedicated instructors and classes tailored to their personal growth.

Through a variety of services, People Inc. provides families and individuals with disabilities the assistance they need to live

healthy, independent and productive lives. The YALT program was developed as a comprehensive non-degree, campus-based program for young adults between the ages of 18 and 23 with developmental disabilities. There are a total of six campuses where students may audit courses with the support of staff and peers: Buffalo State College, Erie Community College South, Niagara County Community College, Canisius College, University at Buffalo South Campus, and the longest running YALT program with 10 years in operation, Daemen College.

Students attending the YALT program gain valuable experience through individualized programs designed to smooth the transition from high school to adult life.

They gain education and experiences in independent living; build social skills; and participate in leisure, recreational, and community activities, as well as participate in self-advocacy and career exploration.

The program is intended to be time-limited skill development, focused on preparing students for life in the community. Christy Weber, program administrator from Buffalo State College's YALT said, "The program gives young adults with developmental disabilities an option that they didn't have 10 years ago — to go to college with peers of their same age. They get to join the clubs, use the gym, do internships and sit in on classes. This opens avenues for the participants they didn't know existed!"

Weber had the pleasure of working with Terrance Hassan, a determined and talented student.



Stephanie Edbauer

Terrance was a participant in the Buffalo State YALT program and graduated in 2005. Before enrolling in the program, he attended public high school in Buffalo and had transferred to an Occupational Training Center before participating in YALT. Terrance graduated from high school unable to read, but attained his goal by working extensively with Literacy Volunteers of Buffalo and Erie County, Inc. It is very important to Terrance to advocate for himself as a person with a developmental disability.

Terrance was accepted to the New York State Youth Advocacy Group. He was also accepted to be a part of the New York State Partners in Policy Making. With this position, Terrance travels to Albany once a month to advocate for those with disabilities. When Terrance graduated from the YALT program he was accepted to The Employment Training Program through the OPWDD (Office for People With Developmental Disabilities) and is now interning at Buffalo State YALT as a part-time community based instructor.

Stephanie Edbauer, another successful graduate, who was in the Daemen YALT program for five years, graduated in 2010. Stephanie was an active participant in the Daemen Dorm project, which gave her the opportunity to experience college dorm life. Stephanie excelled through this experience and learned essential skills that helped her to become more independent. Stephanie was able to explore opportunities and find a career in her community that she found interesting and desirable. She participated



Terrance Hassan

in numerous internships with organizations such as the Parent Network of WNY, Darien Lake, Kiss 98.5 Radio and Four Seasons Daycare. Stephanie was very successful at her internships by being willing to learn new tasks and was friendly with her co-workers. She attends the Aspire Co-op program along with Apsire's Technology Today program and participates in the Dining Club and Our Place. Lydia Wright, a staff member at the Daemen YALT program who worked closely with Stephanie said, "She was a very positive and well-liked individual."

The program's goal is to enrich learning environments through the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all facets of college life. Jennifer, a YALT student said, "I like coming to YALT because I have goals and they are helping me reach my goals. I really like being on campus and learning. After I get my GED I want to take college classes."

Many graduates receive assistance with job placement after graduation, which helps further their independence.

Students, teachers, staff and the community alike have been enriched by the incorporation of YALT programs on their college campuses. The YALT staff engages students in learning and encourages involvement in campus life outside the classroom. Staff members on each participating college campus care deeply about helping their students to reach each goal they set for themselves. Those involved believe that teaming up with People Inc. has helped to enhance the lives of young people with disabilities as well as those around them.

YALT allows students to be a part of a college campus, yet receive the personalized and hands-on learning support that meets their needs and provides personal satisfaction. YALT's trademark slogan is "keeping students with disabilities on the right track," but they provide much more than that. Trained staff strive to help the students achieve personal goals and provide them with active learning opportunities which teach, guide and prepare them for broader independence in adult life that wasn't possible just a decade ago.

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Brogan McCabe is an intern in the Public Affairs department at People Inc., and is a coach at Immaculate Conception School in East Aurora. People Inc. is a not-for-profit health and human services agency providing programs and services to more than 10,000 people with special needs, their families, and seniors throughout Western New York, since 1971.



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