

## Mapping a Plan for your Child's Future

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"Where do we begin?" is what I hear from parents when their child with CdLS reaches his or her teen years. When asked what their plans are for their child after high school, they often say they want the same type of life for him or her as any typical young adult. This includes working or volunteering, spending times with friends, and having a safe and happy life. However, most parents and guardians are at a loss for how to make these plans happen. Every student in a public education program has the right to a transition plan made at the *Individual Education Program (IEP)* meeting when they turn 16 years old. The federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* mandates that the plan be attached to the IEP and updated at each meeting until the student graduates.

If the child is able, she or he may be present at each IEP meeting to make choices about future plans. There are several programs used by schools and agencies to guide individuals and families during this important planning. Sometimes a teacher or an agency worker leads the group through the planning; other groups hire a facilitator familiar with the planning tool. The planning tools may have different names, such as McGill Action Planning System (MAPS), COACH or Person-Centered Planning, but they all have the same vision: to plan for the family and young adult's future by building partnerships and supporting choices. The planning stage can include several components for discussion: further education or training programs, long-term care plans, transportation, health care, safety, recreation, financial need, who is in the circle of support, companionship, and having a purposeful life. A good plan also takes into account the following:

- Ongoing planning involving the consumer, the family, service coordinator from the state agency (e.g., state Dept. of Developmental Services), and others on the planning team.
- The team values the person's choices and partnerships that support self-determination and interdependence.
- Adults are supported in natural settings in their local communities, with opportunities to live in their own homes, have meaningful activities, and to participate in the life of their communities.
- There is a high level of cooperation and a sense of partnership among all people on the planning team to overcome barriers and work through concerns.
- The complexities of providing services and supports to individuals





and families require coordination and cooperation between governmental and community agencies so there are no gaps in the provision of services or support.

- The plan is based on the individual's strengths, capabilities, preferences, lifestyle, and cultural background.
- The focus is on the consumer and family with team members who are consultants or advisors helping the individual achieve his/her preferred future.
- Natural supports are personal relationships and associations that are developed in the community, that enhance the quality and security of life for the consumer. These include friendships in the neighborhood and community, associations with fellow students, co-workers, club memberships, joining organizations, and civic activities of interest.

Navigating and making a plan for a young adult is never easy, but there's help available in every state. Contact your child's caseworker or teacher to get help making a map for your child's future.

