

# Helping young adults transition

Special to WNC Parent

Turning 18 years old is a rite of passage for all kids. They go from teenagers to young adults; they can vote in their first election; they can serve the country; and for most, they start their next chapters at a college, university or by finding work.

However, for students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities (I/DD), their story does not always go along the same path after high school. The transition from high school to young adulthood is a critical stage for all teenagers and requires extra planning and goal setting for those with I/DD.

“Many parents don’t know what to do once their child with special needs completes high school,” said Kerri Eaker, education outreach coordinator for Family Support Network of WNC. “They have had a set routine because of school, but after high school, what does the new ‘everyday’ look like?”

Once a child turns 18, there are a lot of changes in the way the services and support gets provided. The definition of disability changes; parents’ income is no longer applicable to their child, and that opens up new benefits and services. Early transition planning can help families and their child with I/DD understand what resources are available to them so their child can stay on a continued path to success.

It is important for parents of children with disabilities to understand and begin the process of planning the transition early. Working with the school system’s special education staff can help start the process of knowing what options are available to the student and the families. This includes learning about and organizing information on post-secondary education programs, development of vocational skills and/or career paths and independent living skill development.

Statewide agencies like Vocational Rehabilitation and Local Management Entity-Managed Care Organizations (LME/MCO) such as Smoky Mountain can provide guidance and resources for employment, benefits, housing and more. Other important topics to also consider when creating a transition plan are guardianship, alternatives to guard-

ianship and estate planning.

But, before parents and their child begin transition planning, it is important to know what the future looks like. In Mission Children’s Hospital’s Family Support Network’s Transition Guide, it prompts the families and the young adult with disabilities to start thinking about things such as: Where will I live? Who will I live with? What will I be doing? Who will be helping me?

Will I have a job? Will I attend college? Additionally, at age 18, in North Carolina young adults become responsible legally for their own health care decisions. A strong transition plan includes a process of preparing and moving from a model of healthcare for children to a model for adults. It is important to make sure that the young adult is knowledgeable and learns how to manage their health. This includes advocating for themselves with doctors and providers.

Mission Children’s Hospital’s Family Support Network provided resources for parents and youth with disabilities on these issues, and many more, at the sixth-annual Regional Transition into Adulthood Fair: A Journey towards Independence: Positive Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities.

Chris Egan, North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities’ executive director, gave the keynote address.

“Strong, early transition planning for our young adults with disabilities sets high expectations for them as they explore options in post-secondary education or supported employment,” said Egan, who is also a parent of a child with a disability. “It is important to support families, teachers and others involved in the life of a child with I/DD to set the bar



high and explore the many positive options after high school that will help their child become successful adults.”

*To learn more about transition planning, contact Kerri Eaker at the Family Support Network of WNC, at 828-213-0047, or by email at [kerri.eaker@msj.org](mailto:kerri.eaker@msj.org). For more information on the Family Support Network, call 828-213-1740 or visit [missionchildrens.org](http://missionchildrens.org). Download the Transition Guide at [www.missionchildrens.org/mydocuments/transitions\\_guide\\_final\\_2015.pdf](http://www.missionchildrens.org/mydocuments/transitions_guide_final_2015.pdf)*