



Web site debuts to help disabled make transition

After graduation, resources harder to find

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Blake Bossert has been through this himself, so he knows what young Delawareans with disabilities need when they get out of high school.

The 20-year-old Newark man helped develop Transition Map Delaware, a Web site being launched today by the University of Delaware's Center for Disabilities Studies.

The site is meant for youths and young adults who need to find information about everything from medical care to social events and housing options. Whether they are planning their lives after they graduate from public school or looking for places to play sports, they'll find names and numbers, and lots of information.

"It can help you from when you leave high school, but there's stuff on there that I found that I can use now, even being late in the game," said Bossert, who overcame a learning disability to graduate with honors from Delcastle Technical High School in 2004. "And if I would have known what I know now, I could have gotten some stuff that might have been helpful."

The Web site was developed by members of the center's LEAD -- Leadership, Employment, Advocacy Development -- program, which provides training for those with developmental disabilities, said Cory Nourie of the UD center. Bossert was a member of that program.

At graduation, life changes

Parents of children with disabilities often worry what will happen when their children graduate from school and the services and structure they received there suddenly end. For some, that day comes when they finish 12th grade. For those with more severe disabilities, it comes at the end of the school year in which they reach their 21st birthday.

"You need to prepare this population of students so they're not left in June sitting at home all summer with no quality of life," said Carmen Sheppard, who coordinates school-to-work transitions for Red Clay Consolidated School District. "There are a lot of things out there, you just have to make them aware."

The site is a partnership between the UD center and Ken-Crest Services, which provides residential services to adults with cognitive disabilities. The site is paid for by grants from a number of local groups.

Assistance still needed

While in public school, students with disabilities have individual education plans designed by parents, their class- room teachers and professional teams that include a psychologist. The plan is renewed annually, and the final plan is supposed to include a transition plan.

But the shift after school still is a jolt to many.

Dottie Lund, of Brandywine Hundred, is planning ahead for her son, Wesley, who will graduate from the

ON THE WEB

Transition Map Delaware:
www.transitionmapde.org

Center for Disabilities Studies:
www.udel.edu/cds

Ken-Crest Services:
www.kencrest.org

Delaware Autism Program in 2007.

Lund is a knowledgeable parent because of her involvement with the Autism Society of Delaware and other advocacy groups, and because the Autism Program provides specific information to parents. The state offers transition assistance, too, through the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, she said.

"But the reality is, you have to take the initiative," Lund said. "You have to understand it on your own. This [Web site] will be one more tool."

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