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Tashauna Swanson Pursues Career

By Stefanie Gaulrapp



Tashauna Swanson

“Always dream, and never give up!”

Am I ready for the transition between school and employment? Where do I really want to move? Going to school was my routine, so could I just give education up cold turkey and be happy in the workforce? These are some of the many questions that might run through a person’s head when living with a disability and leaving high school.

In today’s society, individuals like myself and others who are disabled need to work harder to get jobs because in a sense we are a minority. We are forced to prove ourselves to society that we can be just as active

and productive as anyone else.

Everyone’s situation is different, but whether you are looking at more education or working, you need a good plan. The first thing would be to do your research. Figure out what you need, where you need it, and all of the available resources that can help you out. Some basic places to start are local Centers for Independent Living, the Health and Human Services agencies in your area, home health care companies, etc. Second, a person needs to be brave and to stay calm if things sometimes don’t go right. The thing is, we deserve to live our lives. If something isn’t being done correctly, we need to do something or say something to fix it. Third, push your limits. Don’t be afraid to do something new every once in awhile. Find your comfort zone when you have gotten comfortable being independent for awhile and gotten into a familiar routine, then try the new stuff. Venture out by yourself if you can, meet your neighbors, find a hobby.

Living with a severe physical disability, Tashauna Swanson, a graduate from Southwest State University, shares her thoughts and

opinion on how to become successful after graduating from college.

According to Swanson, it’s not as easy as you think it might be, and it will never be as quick as you want it to be. “Transition takes time. The important thing to remember is to always dream, and never give up. Things will fall into place eventually, but the timeline varies for everyone. Don’t rush yourself, and don’t feel defeated when things don’t fit together right away,” she said.

Currently, Swanson is applying to graduate school to earn an MFA in Fashion Merchandising through the Art Academy University in San Francisco. They have an array of programs that can be done totally online. Since she has always had an interest in fashion, she originally wanted to be a fashion designer. In thinking realistically however, because of her

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What's Wrong with this Picture?

Counters for sales or distribution of goods or services should have a portion of the counter at least 36 inches in length with a maximum height of 36 inches above the floor.



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physical limitations, fashion merchandising seemed to be a more accessible field and it encompasses many different career possibilities.

In addition to getting her application ready for grad school, she has been planning a workshop for the incoming college students who have disabilities. It is something she wished Southwest State had when she first started college. It's hard enough starting college, but for someone with a disability, there's a lot of planning involved. It has become increasingly important to her to change the views and attitudes of society in relation to the disabled community.

In the future Swanson hopes to move to a larger area and find a job that she is passionate about. While working on her educational goals, Swanson encourages other individuals with disabilities to have confidence in themselves that they can fulfill their goals and succeed at whatever they wish. ■

Proposals for Progress Rally



A group of Freedom staff and leadership graduates attended the *Proposals for Progress Rally* on April 12th at the State Capitol in St. Paul. Following the rally, the group was able to meet and discuss issues with elected officials from Freedom's service area, including Representatives Paul Marquart and Bud Nornes, and Senators Dan Skogen and Keith Langseth. Pictured: (seated) Seth Bachman; L-R: Rep. Nornes, Donna Solin, Joyce Wolter, Matt Solin, Kathleen Pike, Scott Burlingame and Kelly Noack.

From Where I Sit - For 30 Years

by Nate Aalgaard, executive director

Transition: Movement, passage, or change from one position, state, stage, subject, concept, etc., to another; change: *the transition from adolescence to adulthood.*

In this issue, we're featuring some stories about people transitioning from one part of life to another. It got me thinking about my own transition, which began 30 years ago. I was almost 18 when I broke my neck in a car accident. I had just graduated from high school and was trying to figure out what I really wanted to do with the next year of my life. Suddenly, all the choices and options that I had before didn't seem possible, whether it be college, work, or anything. I had to immediately adjust the way I thought about my future, even while not fully understanding everything about my disability. It was a big crash, both physically and mentally.

Even though I spent a total of about six months so-called rehabilitating, there was a lot that I didn't know. I got home in February. Not long after that my parents started asking me what I planned to do with the rest of my life. I thought, "What do you mean; isn't this good enough?" I didn't really have to worry about who would help me get up in the morning, or fix the food, or wash the clothes, or help me with my daily hygiene needs. It was all taken care of by my family. But my parents knew, and I probably knew too, that I couldn't just sit there and do nothing. I wouldn't have been satisfied with that for long.

At some point during the next few months we went to visit the vocational rehabilitation office. I met with a

counselor and she basically told me that any kind of job future for me would involve further education. My high school degree and experience in manual labor were not going to cut it. At that time, my options for higher education that had some level of accessibility and services for people with disabilities such as mine, according to my rehab counselor, were the University of North Dakota, Southwest State in Marshall Minnesota, and the University of Minnesota Duluth. I ended up picking UND because it was only an hour away and I figured I could go home on weekends. I wasn't fully ready to give up all the creature comforts I had, and I knew virtually no one at that school or in the city of Grand Forks. Yes, I was a little scared about the whole thing.

So I started that August. The disabilities services staff was very helpful and assured me that other people like me had been successfully going to school, and I could too. Of course, they were right. I was happy to find many other people with physical disabilities there who were going through or had gone through the same things I did. I learned more from the guys in my dorm about how to live with quadriplegia than I ever did in rehab. I eventually started playing wheelchair sports, which helped improve both my physical strength and my outlook on life.

After acquiring my disability, my personality did not transform, but I gradually had to adjust my goals and ambitions and work to change the environment, not just myself. I learned some things too late, like how to manage my benefits so that I didn't lose medical coverage. I didn't



Nate Aalgaard, executive director

know much about my rights for things like accessibility. That would come in handy with some of those extra heavy doors, the shower I could barely get into, or the parking spaces that were not enforced. And I didn't plan for contingencies like my personal assistant getting drunk and forgetting to come back to the room to help me to bed. But as a result, I learned to do it myself. Invention was born out of necessity.

It took me over a year to get my first job out of college. In those days, we didn't have the ADA. Employers could simply look the other way and hire somebody else without even having to think of how to accommodate somebody like me. In that respect, we've made progress, although there is much more that needs to be done. Looking back over 30 years it seems like an awfully long time, but it has flown by too. I'm extremely thankful for all the people along the way who helped me to learn, and grow, and become the person I am today—my own transition. ■

What does Transition mean in your Child's Life?

by Joyce Wolter, IL Advocate

When parents hear that their student is going to begin Transition Services at school, they often have no idea what that means. I myself had no idea what that meant, and I searched for answers. My first questions were, "What is the school's responsibilities, and what are they supposed to be doing for my child?" An advocate by nature, I wanted to ensure that they followed letter of the law, and some that aren't written, which I call "mom's law." To my surprise, I found I also had a role in the process, as did my daughter, Social Services, and anybody else who may play a role in her adult life. All of this and she was only 14. I quickly found this transition thing was a much bigger animal than I thought. If done correctly, it could positively impact the rest of her life. I also found that if done incorrectly, it could be a BIG missed opportunity.

In Minnesota, Transition begins at age 14, and in North Dakota at 16, regardless of what grade a student is in. The process is to assist the family and the student with the disability in making plans for the future of the student beyond high school. This does not mean that if your child does not plan on post-secondary education that Transition Services are not important to him or her. The team of people who knows your child at school and in the community should come together and assist you and your child in making a plan.

There are numerous questions to ask and many, many possibilities for our children. A student in Transition should be asking such things as: "What am I going to do after High School? Where am I going to live? Do I know how to get to the movie, grocery store, or bank? If not, who will help me learn to do that? If that is not possible, who will assist me in getting there safely and assist me in doing what I need to do while I am there?"

Many parents assume that their child will live with them after High School. My

husband and I both thought that too, until we realized that one day we would pass away and the only world our daughter knew--her surroundings and her family--would instantly change. We, like all parents, had to develop a plan for where our child would live in the future.

Next, parents need to look at what their child will do during their days. The Day Activity Center (DAC) was not a place that we want our child to be and is certainly not a place she wants to be. She would in all likelihood become depressed and shut down in that situation. That would not meet her needs. She is a social person, full of life, and she needs more to life than a DAC. So our search for a more meaningful life for her began, and that meant that she would need to move to a bigger town than where we lived.

As parents you will need to meet with your child, your child's social worker and the rest of the team and discuss all the opportunities that are available for your child. Your child does not need to stay in the county in which you live currently to continue with county services. If there are opportunities that exist in other counties that fit the needs of your child it is perfectly okay to advocate that they move to another county. These plans are based on the needs of your child.

While all of the classmates are making plans for their lives, so should your child with a disability. They can make a plan for their future. They know where they want to be living, what kind of activities they will be participating in, and where they want to work and have recreation and leisure. They are able to actively participate in the planning of their future just like their peers. You will be surprised at how much you learn about your child through the Transition process if it is done correctly.

Please note that this article only focused on one of the five areas of Transition. Please call us for more information. ■

Advice from the Disability Services Office

Jennifer Erickson is a Disability Specialist at the Counseling Center/ Disability Services Office at NDSU. She offers some advice to students with disabilities who plan to enter college.

Contact colleges/universities that are of interest to identify disability documentation requirements since this can vary between institutions (different forms etc.)

If the student's most recent testing for a learning disability was more than three years ago, consider having it done again as a junior or senior in high school. This will help provide a basis for reasonable accommodations in college if the student meets eligibility requirements. In general, colleges are not obligated to pay for testing.

If the student anticipates needing accommodations in order to have equal access to a college education, he or she should open a file with a disability services office. If the student later determines that accommodations are not needed, there is no harm done. Instructors are not required to implement classroom accommodations until a file is opened and verification of a disability (including approved accommodations) is received from the Disability Services Office.

For students with mobility impairment issues, it is best to take care of any barriers as soon as possible. Scheduling a visit to campus during the senior year, or during the summer before starting college and checking out the routes to the various buildings is a good idea. The Disability Services Office can then request a work order to address the problem before the student begins classes.

Be aware that services in college may not be provided to the extent they were in high school. The student should discuss possible accommodations with the Disabilities Services staff and learn more about what can reasonably be expected from their professors and college in general. Typically, eligibility must be determined before accommodation requests will be reviewed and considered.

Most importantly, start early.

For more information on how to prepare for the transition to college, readers are invited to visit the following website. <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/transitn/DSS.shtm>

One Day, One Tie

Lisa Lach has started a memorial, One Day, One Tie, in loving memory of her son Jonathan Lach. He was killed in a car accident on December 14, 2006. Lisa remembers her son as a caring and generous young man. "He would have given you the tie off his neck if you needed it, she said. Jon had an infectious smile, sparkling eyes; he was gracious, friendly, and he cared about everyone."

When Lisa was asked if she would do an interview for an article in our newsletter she said, "My story isn't very interesting, just one mother who loves her son and is willing to help others on behalf of my son's death."

Lisa's story is a moving account of her personal growth and healing through domestic violence, her own mental health issues, and a brain injury. From coping with every mother's greatest sorrow, the loss of a child, to overcoming her own daily personal challenges; hers is a transformation in which life's worst tragedies lead to a greater discovery of a deeper love for all of humanity. Lisa's motivation is demonstrated through her participation in Partners in Policymaking, her return to school, and through her many volunteer activities in the community. She has proven how overwhelming personal struggles can offer motivation to discover the strength for growth.

One Day, One Tie, has become a healing passion for Lisa and she is hopeful this memorial will help make Jonathan's gift of giving continuous. Her goal is to collect 6,812 ties by December 14, 2007--one tie for each day he lived. They will be distributed to disadvantaged men who might use the tie as a finishing accessory to their wardrobe for a job interview or a special event, just as Jonathan might have.

Lisa's dream, to develop a

non-profit to assist men where they might be able to dress for success, learn about job interviewing skills and discover self-confidence, is an extension of her generosity and her belief in supporting others through their own personal struggles. Lisa believes self-confidence and achievement are reciprocal; they are mutually reinforcing. It is this belief that drives her passion to grow her vision for her non-profit.

Lisa's personal experience to remember Jonathan's story, through One Day, One Tie, is also about the lessons she has learned of work, survival, loss, and love. She did not become a victim of the tragedy of her son's death. She realized she had a choice--to become another victim of tragedy or to emerge victorious, freeing her heart to appreciate every precious moment of her life and see the gift of memory for the miracle it is.

Let's help Lisa make her goal of 6,812 ties. Donations of gently used or new men's neckties can be made to Lisa Lach by calling her at 701-799-9007 or can be dropped off at Freedom Resource Center. ■



Information

In an attempt to reduce the cost of mailings please send your email address to freedom@freedomrc.org

If you would like to be removed from our mailing list please call 701-478-0459 or 1-800-450-0459.

Freedom Resource Center and/ or its Board of Directors do not necessarily endorse or support any of the views expressed within the personal testimonies contained in this newsletter, unless approval is specifically mentioned.

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Alternate formats available upon request.

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The Mission of Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living is to work toward equality and inclusion for people with disabilities through programs of empowerment, community education and systems change.

We envision a society where ALL individuals are valued, respected and have equal opportunity, access, responsibility, and freedom of choice in all aspects of life.

Up Coming Events...

August 20-21, 2007 • North Dakota Disabilities Advocacy Consortium (NDDAC) • Kelly Inn, Bismarck, ND
Third Annual Dakota Disabilities Issues Conference "Keeping the Promise" and The Road to Freedom ADA bus tour.

Contact Information: Call NDDAC at 701-223-0347 or 1-877-766-6907 Toll Free.

A limited number of stipends are available to assist people who wish to attend this conference with the registration fee or hotel room cost.



September 13, 5:00 p.m. • Freedom's Annual Meeting
Fargo Holiday Inn- Dakota Hall • Tickets: \$10 from any Freedom staff.



September 14, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., O'Kelly's, Fargo, ND
Organizing for Change workshop with Julie Ballinger, Disability Rights and IL Consultant.
Cost: \$10, scholarships available. Call for details.



September 27 at 7:00 p.m. Strategies for Independence Workshop,
Freedom Resource Center office, Fergus Falls
PCA Choice Options and Assistive Technology for families of children with disabilities and young adults.
Presenter: Connie Erlandson, Minnesota Department of Human Services.
Call Joyce for more details: 218-998-1799



October 23, 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. • What's New in Special Education (Fergus Falls)
What parents should know about changes in Minnesota Rules and Statutes and in the federal regulations for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004).
Call Joyce for more details: 218-998-1799



October 24-26 • Vocational Rehabilitation/Independent Living conference, Grand International Inn, Minot.
Consumer stipends available.