Facilitator’s Guide to *Preparing for Adulthood*

From the day they are born, children are preparing for adulthood. They learn how to interact with their world from their parents and teachers. Their world generally revolves around home and school. But this changes when they become adults. Suddenly, the routines of childhood are replaced by the freedom to live where and how they choose.

Typically, children face these choices when they finish high school. For young adults with disabilities, this transition involves securing the supports that will allow them to

* live in the home of their choice,
* work or engage in activities that contribute to the community,
* have meaningful relationships, and
* have good health.

What this means for each person depends on his or her needs, whether complex, special, medical, or physical. The school provides services to meet these needs until students are 21, but individuals with disabilities and their families must find other support when high school ends.

CP of NYS created this PowerPoint presentation to help you explain to individuals with disabilities and their families options for life after high school and how to get the help they need to pursue those options.

# Delivering the PowerPoint Presentation

Families and students will be curious, and maybe even anxious, about what happens when school-based services are no longer available. You can help answer some of their questions by reviewing the slides of the presentation with them. This Facilitator’s Guide offers talking points that highlight things on each slide you want to be sure to share.

The presentation describes school resources (including the IEP), government resources, and local resources for students with disabilities embarking on adulthood. Families should receive a paper copy of the slides so they do not have to take notes or write down contact numbers and email addresses. Many of the slides feature a “For More Information” box. If families want more information and time allows, right-click on the hyperlinks to go to websites and download documents. The URLs are included on the slides, so families can access these resources on their own if they prefer. Families will also receive a checklist of tasks to help their child.

Encourage families and students to ask questions, reassuring them that no topic is too minor. If you do not know the answer to a question, suggest that families contact the school or offer to help them find the answer. Depending on the extent of your conversation, the presentation will take approximately 20 minutes.

# Talking Points

## Slide 1: Title Page

Welcome. CP of NYS created this presentation to help you know what to expect when students who have an IEP finish high school. You probably have many questions, and I hope reviewing this information will help answer them. You will receive a paper copy of this presentation, so do not worry about taking notes. If you have any questions, please ask me. If I do not know the answer, we can work together on finding it.

## Slide 2: Our Goal

This presentation is part of a larger effort to encourage person-centered and community-based support of individuals with disabilities. Every individual, regardless of ability, has the right to choose how and where to live. For individuals with disabilities, various types of support make this choice possible.

Choice often comes at times of transition. Change can be difficult, but knowing your choices can ease the process. This presentation focuses on a change everyone encounters: leaving high school. It will introduce you to some of the support choices for life beyond high school.

## Slide 3: Objectives

Let’s start by looking at what we’ll discuss during this session. We will address these questions:

* What happens when students with IEPs turn 21?
* Why do we need to plan?
* When do we start planning?
* Where do we begin?
* Whom do we contact?

We’ll spend most of our time talking about the last two questions so that you can get started with your planning. At the end of the presentation, you will find a checklist to help you on your journey from school to adult living.

## Slide 4: What Happens at Age 21?

As students mature, they take on more and more adult activities. They engage in hobbies, volunteer in their communities, and work. They explore how they want to live their lives.

For individuals with disabilities, support during transition to adulthood is especially important because they will need to secure services that allow them to live as independently as they wish. Until the age of 21, services are available through the school under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. When no longer eligible for school-based services, young adults must find, with their family, services in the community.

## Slide 5: Why You Need to Plan

Young adults do not automatically receive services from another source when they are no longer eligible for school-based services. Depending on their needs, this may mean going from five days of full-day services in school to only a few hours of services per week.

With your help, your student must plan how to fill her day with meaningful activity when she is finished with high school. How will she interact with other community members? Will he work or prepare for work? Where will he work? Will she pursue other education or training? Will he live at home with you, alone in his own apartment, or in an individualized residential alternative with others? Where can you find the help your student will need to live the life she wants?

## Slide 6: When to Start Planning

During school years, an Individualized Education Plan (or IEP) guides the services students receive. New York State requires that IEPs include goals and recommendations for transition services after high school. Starting no later than age 15, the IEP must set forth how individuals with disabilities will prepare for adult living. This means exploring the many options for community services, employment, further education and training, and independent living. There is a great deal to consider, so the earlier you start planning, the better!

## Slide 7: IEP Transition Services

What are transition services? They are a coordinated set of activities that help students reach their goals after high school.

* *Instruction* includes general or special education courses to meet academic requirements or career and technical education.
* *Related services* is a very broad category. It includes speech pathology and audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, counseling services, school health services, and even parent training.
* *Community experiences* occur outside of the school building, either during or after the school day. Volunteering, residential or college tours, and recreational activities are all experiences that promote community integration.
* *Development of employment and other adult living objectives* involves job-seeking and -keeping skills, career exploration, and actual work.
* The last two activities are included if they apply to the student. *Daily living skills* mean caring for oneself (personal hygiene, household chores, managing finances, etc.). A variety of *assessment activities*, such as assistive technology evaluations or aptitude tests, can reveal more about the student’s needs, preferences, and interests.

Although tailored somewhat to New York City, Advocates for Children of New York’s *Guide to Transition Services: Helping Students with Disabilities Move from School to Adulthood* (noted in the “For More Information” box) provides valuable information about the transition process.

## Slide 8: Considerations

Students and families must consider many aspects of adulthood, such as those listed on this slide. The needs and interests of the student will determine the degree to which a specific consideration will be pursued. For example, someone who has no plans to attend college may spend more energy preparing for employment or volunteer work. The post-secondary (after high school) goals in the IEP should reflect these needs and interests.

## Slide 9: Self-Determination

IEP goals are based on the student’s interests, dreams, and strengths. This promotes his or her sense of self-determination. Everyone has the right to live the life of their choosing. Encourage your student to think about what that life looks like and help him or her share that vision with people who can help.

## Slide 10: It’s a Team Effort

There are many people who can help your child realize his or her dream. During the school years, students and families are part of a Committee on Special Education (CSE) that develops the IEP. Teachers, other school staff, and related service providers are also on the committee. When transition to life after school is discussed, other people might be invited to the IEP meeting. They may include representatives from vocational rehabilitation agencies, the Social Security Administration, services agencies, and independent living centers.

## Slide 11: Government Resources

The slides we just reviewed addressed the role the school plays in transition planning. However, as mentioned in the last slide, there is help outside of school. We will talk about three government agencies that provide support to individuals with disabilities; the Social Security Administration (SSA), the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), and New York State Education Department’s Adult Career and Continuing Education Service-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR). You may already interact with one or all of these agencies, but we will review what they offer to students who are transitioning from high school.

## Slide 12: SSA – Programs for People with Disabilities

SSA is a federal agency that supports individuals with disabilities through many programs. The next few slides present an overview of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Medicaid and Medicare, and some work incentive programs.

## Slide 13: SSA – Supplemental Security Income

SSI provides monthly benefits to people who are disabled, blind, or elderly so they can pay for food, clothing, and shelter. It is based on financial need. There are no age limits for individuals who are disabled. However, eligibility rules are different for those under age 18 than for those over 18.

## Slide 14: SSA – SSI and Transition

What do you need to do about SSI when planning for transition? As your child nears age 18, you should contact SSA.

* If he already receives SSI benefits, you will need to confirm his eligibility as an adult. Plus, you should alert the CSE to SSI benefits that your student receives, as they may impact paid work opportunities.
* If your student does not currently receive SSI benefits, contact SSI for an eligibility review as an adult. Or, talk to someone at the school who knows about the SSI application process.

## Slide 15: SSA – Social Security Disability Insurance

SSDI provides benefits to people who cannot work due to a disability. To qualify, you must have worked a certain amount of time and paid Social Security taxes. What does SSDI have to do with transitioning students? Children with disabilities who are no longer dependents (age 18; if enrolled full time in high school, age 19) may qualify for SSDI benefits based on their parents’ work histories. The disability must have started before age 22.

## Slide 16: SSA – Medicaid and Medicare

Two SSA programs that are often confused are Medicaid and Medicare. Medicaid is a needs-based program that pays for medical services. There are no age limits. Often, individuals with disabilities are among the priority groups to receive Medicaid. We will come back to Medicaid when we talk about New York State’s OPWDD.

Medicare, on the other hand, provides health insurance to people over age 65 and to people under 65 who have a disability.

## Slide 17: SSA – Work Incentive: PASS

SSA offers work incentive programs that help students enter the world of work. With Plans to Achieve Self-Support (PASS), individuals at least 15 years old and eligible for SSI can save income and resources to pay for education and other things that they may need to work, such as job coaching, transportation, or equipment.

## Slide 18: SSA – Work Incentive: Ticket to Work

As students get closer to leaving high school, they may be eligible for Ticket to Work. This is for anyone ages 18 through 64 who receive SSDI or SSI benefits because of a disability. An Employment Network or state vocational rehabilitation agency provides career counseling, vocational rehabilitation, job placement and training, and other job-related services.

## Slide 19: OPWDD – Employment and Community Inclusion

New York State’s Office for People with Developmental Disabilities is committed to helping people with disabilities live richer lives. It, too, offers job-related services, including:

* Supported employment (SEMP) is for individuals who have less intensive needs. Often, they come to SEMP after being trained on the job or completing programs like ACCES-VR, which we will talk about in a few minutes.
* Prevocational services are for individuals who want to work, but need to develop their skills to do so. Learning and work experiences are not job specific, but build on individuals’ strengths. This might include volunteer work.
* The Employment Training Program (ETP) offers paid internships that will lead to a permanent job with a community business. Participants go to job readiness classes and receive job coaching.
* *Pathway to Employment* helps identify careers, provides job readiness training, and develops a plan for securing competitive employment.

OPWDD promotes integration in the community beyond employment through services such as the following:

* Community habilitation provides hourly paid staff to teach individuals how to live safely and independently in their home and community.
* Assistive technology (such as communication aids and other adaptive tools) and changes to a person’s home (ramps, handrails, roll-in showers) allow safe living.

## Slide 20: OPWDD – Housing

Residential supports are another way OPWDD helps individuals with disabilities live in community settings as independently as possible. This slide lists the many options it supports.

## Slide 21: OPWDD – Enrollment

We mentioned Medicaid on a previous slide. Most OPWDD services, including those listed on this slide, are provided through New York State’s Medicaid program. To access OPWDD services, most individuals will need to enroll in Medicaid. You can apply directly to Medicaid or work with an agency that you want to provide services to your child. To get started with OPWDD, you must attend a Front Door information session.

## Slide 22: OPWDD – Home and Community-Based Services

OPWDD’s largest Medicaid program is the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waiver. It offers many services that allow individuals with disabilities to live, and fully participate, in the community.

* Respite – relief for caregivers of individuals with disabilities
* Supported employment – support for individuals to keep paid competitive jobs in the community
* Community and day habilitation – skills for daily living
* Residential services – support for individuals to live as independently as possible

To receive services through the HCBS program, individuals must enroll in the HCBS waiver program.

## Slide 23: OPWDD – Medicaid Service Coordination

Care Coordinators, formerly called Medicaid Service Coordinators (MSCs), will likely play a big role in the lives of individuals enrolled in Medicaid-funded OPWDD services. Care Coordinators help access services and supports identified in the Life Plan, formerly known as the Individualized Service Plan. The Care Coordinator develops, implements, and maintains the Life Plan based on the individual’s capacities, needs, and desires. As a key member of the individual’s Circle of Support (a group of people chosen by the individual to help achieve his or her goals), the Care Coordinator helps with many tasks, such as those listed on this slide.

OPWDD provides a regional list of staff members best qualified to answer questions about Medicaid Service Coordination requirements. This list can be downloaded through the hyperlink noted on the slide.

## Slide 24: OPWDD – Self-Direction

Individuals and their families may want or need flexibility in services and scheduling. Individuals who choose self-direction work with their Circle of Support to choose services and discuss funding those services. They may enlist the help of a Support Broker to help with financial matters.

## Slide 25: ACCES-VR – Transition and Youth Services

ACCES-VR believes that all individuals with disabilities should have the opportunity to work in jobs within the community. Some of its programs are geared specifically toward youth. To help students with an IEP develop the skills they need to work and gain work experience, Pre-Employment Services are available prior to the final year of high school. Youth Employment Services (YES) are recommended for students in their final year of high school.

## Slide 26: ACCES-VR – Services

Students with disabilities preparing to transition from high school may be eligible for all VR services, which are listed on this slide. An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) guides ACCES-VR services and serves as a road map to employment. A vocational rehabilitation counselor helps develop the IPE.

## Slide 27: Local Resources

We just reviewed many government resources. There are also local resources. Both OPWDD and CP of NYS have interactive directories of services in your area. They provide lists and contact information of nearby providers of day habilitation, employment services, family support, service coordination, transportation, and many other services. These directories can help get you started in your search.

During the late high school years, explore with your student housing options, job opportunities, neighborhood spots, and clubs and associations. Help your student identify what is important to her in terms of how and where she wants to live and be involved in her community. This may involve touring residences, shadowing someone who works in a job of interest, or mapping distances to various places important to the individual.

## Slide 28: Other Ways to Prepare

Gathering information, such as that presented in this session, is a good way to begin preparing for your student’s transition to adulthood. However, it is important to be proactive throughout this process. Any transition involves some degree of disruption in the daily routine, and the transition from school is significant. Talk with other families about their experiences. Are they satisfied with the service provider? Is their child living a safe and fulfilling life? This personal insight will round out the facts you already gathered. As caregivers, you must remember that with growth comes risk. Trying something but failing can teach valuable lessons. As long as there is no danger to anyone’s well-being, young adults should be encouraged to pursue all that life has to offer.

Advocacy is a great skill for both families and students. As students leave the familiar routine of school, they will need to know how to interact with new people. Students must learn how to convey their needs and wishes. Knowing their rights and responsibilities can promote their confidence in doing this.

This transition is an exciting one, but can be overwhelming. Be sure to break down new skills and tasks into small, easy-to-manage steps. Change is never easy. Be sure to talk with your student about what is happening and what the future holds. Enlist the help of the Care Coordinator and draw on the expertise of the Circle of Support.

We’ve noted the phone numbers for local contacts from each of the government agencies that we just discussed. Do you have any questions?

# Concluding the PowerPoint Presentation

At the end of the presentation, present a paper copy for families to take home. They should also receive the Preparing for Adulthood Checklist to guide them on their journey. It includes a few tasks beyond the scope of this presentation, so be sure to review the checklist with them and answer any questions they have.