YOUNG ADULTS in TRANSITION—YAiT

Young Adults in Transition (YAiT, pronounced like “Wyatt”) is a group of lively young adults who want to make a difference in the lives of young people, like themselves, who have disabilities. The goals they have set for their membership include improving communications among service providers, increasing disability awareness in their communities, and strengthening service resources to help youth make successful transitions to college and training, careers, and independence. The members of YAiT hail from various places in Alabama such as Alabaster, Blountsville, Cleveland, Daphne, Chelsea, Columbiana, Mobile, Orange Beach, Pelham, and Warrior.

To help celebrate the Alabama Transition Conference’s twentieth anniversary this year (see next page), YAiT members led and participated in various presentations during the conference and its sessions. Attired in bright blue shirts imprinted with the colorful YAiT logo, they sparked positive responses from the education and rehabilitation professionals in the audience. In fact, several of them were motivated to ask how they could get a YAiT group started in their own communities.

One of YAiT’s future activities entails creating a training module for Training in Transition (“TNT”) called “My Plan for Transition.” This module, slated for a Spring 2011 release, will promote disability awareness, self-advocacy skills, and student-led Individualized Education Program planning. Although it is to be student-focused, the module will aim to influence professionals also. We wish these determined young people success as they carry out their plans to make our world a better place!
“Celebrating 20 years together!” was the theme of the 20th annual Alabama Transition Conference, a celebration of the successes of the transition process and the dedication of professionals, parents, and other stakeholders who support students with disabilities in the state of Alabama. It was 20 years ago that our state’s trailblazers established this event—one of the first statewide conferences in the nation dedicated to transition issues. Today, the legacy of empowerment continues. This year’s “anniversary” conference served as a source of knowledge, remembrance, and inspiration.

Keynote presenters Dr. Mabrey Whetstone of the Alabama Department of Education and Dr. Alexa Posny, Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education (who sent a recorded address to the conference), set the tone by charging all present to practice and accept only the best in student-focused, research-based work, and to set expectations high. Conference events included poster sessions, a Share Fair, 12 workshops and 23 concurrent sessions. To commemorate 20 years of professional and personal development, an anniversary reception featured entertainment, refreshments, and celebratory fireworks. The Transition Up-document closed the conference, featuring members of Young Adults in Transition (YAIT), as well as a panel of local and national leaders in transition-related professions. Not only did the panelists discuss transition news, policy development, and outreach, they also motivated and challenged attendees to continue to strive for excellence and innovation in all they do.

We look forward to seeing you next year at the 21st annual Alabama Transition Conference, March 7 & 8, 2011. Conference updates will be posted at the ATLI Web site, www.auburn.edu/atli, and in the 2011 conference announcement, to be mailed in early October.

There is still much to do to help all of our youth transition into adulthood and achieve their maximum potential. This can only be accomplished through the united effort of professionals, parents, students, and other individuals vested in transition. We must remember that we are preparing tomorrow’s leaders and that this preparation begins today. Please join us in our efforts to continue this journey.

**LOCAL TRANSITION PLANNING SUMMIT**

The Local Transition Planning Summit, first held during the 2010 Alabama Transition Conference, is a new initiative allowing teams of transition practitioners and administrators to develop concrete objectives, goals, and plans for meeting the needs of students with disabilities in their communities. Such goals include increasing graduation rates and decreasing dropout rates, increasing the involvement of parents, improving the quality of individualized education programs (IEPs), and raising the number of students with disabilities entering competitive employment or post-secondary education following graduation. Thirty-eight teams participated, assessing the effectiveness of their current programs and services, and developing completely at least one goal by the end of the two-day event. They returned home with valuable insights and skills to share with the rest of their community transition teams.

The next Summit will take place during the 2011 Alabama Transition Conference (see above). Start getting your team together now—the Summit allows transition professionals to have the time, space, and support to develop goals and plans for improving the outcomes of students with disabilities.
Everett Davis Martin is the head of Auburn University’s Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, & Counseling/School Psychology, and a Wayne T. Smith Distinguished Professor. Recently, when I arrived to interview him, a pastel-colored bag filled with gifts sat on his office floor. He was eagerly anticipating the arrival of his grandson, yet kept an open door to meet with a student. This was indicative of something one soon discovers about him—Dr. Martin loves his work and his interactions with students, faculty, and staff.

When asked how he decided to pursue rehabilitation, he describes receiving his bachelor’s degree in psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University and trying to figure out what to do with it. His chance encounter with a rehabilitation counselor—who was very passionate about his work—turned into a three-hour conversation; it was a turning point for Martin, as he went on to earn a masters in Rehabilitation Counseling and a doctorate in Higher Education Administration/Educational Psychology.

Dr. Martin has explored many paths in the field of rehabilitation, a few of which include counseling juveniles in Virginia correctional facilities, performing evaluations and testifying for court cases, and directing a federal research and demonstration grant which created a job orientation model for individuals with disabilities.

In 2003, after enjoying 25 years as an educator in rehabilitation counseling at Virginia Commonwealth University, Dr. Martin became a faculty member at Auburn University, and he and his family joined the Auburn community. He discloses that perhaps the most meaningful thing to him at Auburn is working with others to create positive change in the lives of people with disabilities.

As the parent of a young man with a cognitive disability and mental health concerns, Martin speaks of his son as a constant source of inspiration, continuing to be amazed and proud of his son’s successes every day.

In his family life, his career, and his community outreach, Dr. Martin has made advocacy and policy work a priority. Recently appointed chair of the Alabama Council for Developmental Disabilities, he also serves as chair of the Advisory Committee for the Governor’s Office on Disability and the Alabama State Rehabilitation Council. The opening of the innovative Center for Disability Research and Service at Auburn University is the newest project to capture his commitment and enthusiasm.

Next time you’re in Dr. Martin’s office, you might want to ask about his grandson, his clock collection, or the latest NASCAR trivia. Or, you may want to ask how you, too, can help produce change.

Scenes from the 2010 Alabama Transition Conference and the Local Transition Planning Summit
STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: Meet Whitney Willis

Whitney Willis, a senior attending Auburn High School, has completed her community-based training experience at the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute (ATLI). The best thing about her work, she said, was gaining experience that she will be able to use in the future.

With the assistance of her job coach, Mrs. Brice, Whitney has been job searching. She is interested in working with children, as she believes she has more patience with kids. During her interview for this newsletter, Whitney confided something that indicates her tenacious ability to initiate goals—she had earned the opportunity to work for pay during the last two summers at the Auburn Day Care-Boykin Center!

During Whitney’s tenure at ATLI, we learned that she truly enjoys going to school and helping out her sister with the care of her new nephew. Whitney indicated that although her disability does not directly affect her ability to perform, having assistance from her team has made school a lot better for her. As for transition, she feels somewhat prepared, but would like to gain even more volunteer and work experience before leaving high school.

After working alongside ATLI’s graduate assistants and learning of interesting opportunities, Whitney is now thinking of applying to attend the 2011 Youth Leadership Forum, held annually at Troy University in Troy, Alabama. Whitney indicated that she plans to remain actively involved with her Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, and especially with her job coach.

ATLI director Dr. Karen Rabren and the Institute staff enjoyed working with Whitney and wish her much success in planning her future and preparing for the roles and responsibilities of young adulthood. Happy to be part of Whitney’s training experience, we look forward to hearing more from this determined and delightful young woman.

Upcoming Events

SEPTEMBER
ATLI welcomes the new dean of Auburn University’s College of Education, Dr. Betty Lou Whitford

OCTOBER
National Disability Employment Awareness Month
www.dol.gov/odep

7 - East Alabama Employment Awards Luncheon

7 & 8 - Alabama Assistive Technology Expo and Conference
www.auburn.edu/outreach/alatec

18–20 - Forging a New Civil Rights Movement Conference
www.pfofal.org

NOVEMBER
2 & 3 - Alabama Rehabilitation Association Conference
Gloria.Crider@rehab.alabama.gov

8 – State Interagency Transition Team Meeting

Newsletter Notes
Do you have an interesting personal story to share about the transition process? Our newsletter staff would like to hear from you! Call 334-844-5927.

Archived issues of ATLI “Directions” are saved at www.auburn.edu/atli (click on “Publications”).