The destination of these travelers’s journey is unknown. However, because of transition programming and the collective efforts of many individuals, our transition travelers are one step closer to achieving their dreams.

The People Behind ATLI

Dr. Karen Rabren, Director
Dee Glanzer, Outreach Coordinator
George Hall, Research Coordinator
Courtney Dotson, Instruction Coordinator
Myra Thomas, Clerical Assistant

Dr. Ronald Eaves, Research Associate, Professor Emeritus
Sophie G. Ahmad, Graduate Assistant
Mridula Allani, Graduate Assistant
Megan D. Cobb, Graduate Assistant
 Jian Fang, Graduate Assistant
Lakesha D. King, Graduate Assistant
Melissa Silvester, Graduate Assistant

SPECIAL EDITION
BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES
FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

Student Spotlight: A Special Report
Autumn Marie Rollins | Timothy Louis Little | Austin Stuart Wentworth
Welcome to the ATLI

The Auburn Transition Leadership Institute (ATLI) aims to help young people with disabilities successfully transition into adulthood by utilizing a three-pronged approach of research, instruction, and outreach. Auburn University faculty, staff, and graduate students work together on each of these facets.

The ATLI engages in a range of research projects with the ultimate goal of improving transition programs. Currently, the institute’s primary research projects include examining post-school outcomes, parental or family involvement, students’ needs, and the roles of gender and rural environments in the transition process, among other endeavors. Faculty and graduate students of the institute also provide instruction to university students specializing in areas relevant to the transition process.

One of the ATLI’s largest projects is the annual Alabama Transition Conference, the next of which will be held March 8-9th, 2019 and will mark its 20th anniversary. Attracting approximately 700 attendees each year, this conference emphasizes effective practices for transition programs. This year, a Local Transition Planning Summit will be featured alongside the conference, in which participants will be provided with further tools to implement these practices at the local level.

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We hope that you will join us in our mission to assist youth with disabilities in achieving a successful transition to adulthood! For further information about the ATLI, please look us up on the web at https://fp.auburn.edu/institute/_SITE/index.asp.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute is to help youth with disabilities achieve successful integration into community life by providing continuous improvement resources to the systems, practitioners, and citizens who assist these young people with their transition to adulthood.

What does Transition Look Like?

By: Timothy Little (One of the featured students)
THE POWER OF LANGUAGE
(U sing P e r s o n F i r s t L a n g u a g e)

The power of our words should never be underestimated. Our words profoundly influence our perceptions and actions towards others. It is with our words that we can esteem, motivate, and positively affect others. We also possess the power to dis esteem and deprecate others with our word choice. For example, when people with disabilities are described as “disabled”, “retarded”, or “handicapped”, it is offensive. We must make a conscious effort to use language that empowers and uplifts, and person-first language does just that. As the name suggests, person-first language places the person on the focus instead of the disability. For instance, instead of referring to a person as being mentally retarded, you should state that the person has an intellectual or cognitive disability. Hence, place the person first. It is also important to note that you do not always have to refer to people with disabilities in terms of their disabilities. Much like everyone else, they would prefer to be addressed by their names.

TRANSITION WORD SEARCH
Transition, Disability, Advocacy, Benchmarks, Accommodations, IEP, Instruction, Employment, Assessments, Rehabilitation, Education, Inclusion, Collaboration, Student, Services, Independence, Family

PROFESSIONAL MEET & GREET
(Introducing Karen Rabren, Ph.D.)

Dr. Karen Rabren is the director of the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute and an associate professor in the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, Counseling/School Psychology at Auburn University. She has devoted most of her career to the area of transition and is especially interested in (a) post-school outcomes for students with disabilities, (b) secondary curriculum, and (c) transition program development, implementation, and evaluation. According to Dr. Rabren, “My work in the area of transition will never be complete until all students with disabilities exit high school prepared to become, to the greatest extent possible, integrated and contributing members within local communities of their choice. There is a lot of work to do.”

Prior to joining the university, Dr. Rabren was with the Alabama State Department of Education and directed the state’s five-year systems change grant project in transition. Dr. Rabren has published her research in journals such as Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, Journal of Remedial and Special Education, Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, Journal of Learning Disabilities, The High School Journal, and Journal of Instructional Psychology. Dr. Rabren has held leadership positions at the national, state, and local levels. She currently serves on the National Post-School Outcomes Center (NPSOC) Advisory Board, as it works with states to collect and analyze post-school outcome data as required by Indicator #14 of their Annual Performance Reports. She is also a member of the editorial board for Career Development of Exceptional Individuals and a member of the research committee for the Council for Exceptional Children’s Division of Career Development and Transition. Some of Dr. Rabren’s state-level activities have included serving as chair for the Alabama Special Education Advisory Panel, and member of the Alabama State Interagency Transition Team, the Developmental Disabilities Council Executive Board, and the Alabama Rehabilitation Services Advisory Board.

Through her work with the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute, Dr. Rabren has been able to integrate her local, state, and national interests. As she states, “I most enjoy working with the local school systems and communities. They ‘keep me on my toes’ and continue to challenge me.” She goes on to say, “What I learn from schools and communities continues to influence my teaching, research, and outreach activities. I feel a tremendous responsibility to be the ‘voice’ for those in these local communities as I serve on national task forces and take part in regional and national efforts.” Dr. Rabren continues, “I love what I do and hope that I make a small ‘dent’ in the enormous task of helping students with disabilities make successful transitions from adolescence to young adulthood. It is the transition from youth to adulthood that is highly anticipated, yet frightening for youth, particularly those with disabilities. Throughout their school years, these youth receive guidance, support, and services from family members, educators, counselors, and others. As these individuals collaborate on behalf of our young people, they tend to make the transition to adulthood less intimidating and fragmented. With the support of such a group, youth slowly experience some of the facets of adult life and engage in independent decision making. This gradual exposure to adulthood is advantageous to all students, specifically those with disabilities. Working an afterschool job, managing a checking account, participating in summer camps, and doing one’s own laundry can ease the transition into adult living. The more opportunities students have to act independently, the more prepared they are for life after high school. In closing, our youth are preparing for their transition into adulthood. It just takes a united effort to ensure them a smooth evolution.”

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DEFINING TRANSITION

In the broadest sense, transition is the process of moving from one stage of life to another. For example, one transitions from being an infant to a toddler, from being single to married, from being employed to retired, from living to dying. It is the transition from youth to adulthood that is highly anticipated, yet frightening for youth, particularly those with disabilities. Throughout their school years, these youth receive guidance, support, and services from family members, educators, counselors, and others. As these individuals collaborate on behalf of our young people, they tend to make the transition to adulthood less intimidating and fragmented. With the support of such a group, youth slowly experience some of the facets of adult life and engage in independent decision making. This gradual exposure to adulthood is advantageous to all students, specifically those with disabilities. Working an afterschool job, managing a checking account, participating in summer camps, and doing one’s own laundry can ease the transition into adult living. The more opportunities students have to act independently, the more prepared they are for life after high school. In closing, our youth are preparing for their transition into adulthood. It just takes a united effort to ensure them a smooth evolution.

Helping youth and young adults with disabilities meet their educational, career, and social goals.
Transition can be equated to going on a journey. Each journey is unique to its traveler. Some travelers are just beginning their expeditions, while others are midway through or possibly nearing the conclusion, only to move on to a new voyage. Regardless of the milestone, every traveler has a story to tell. Therefore, meet some of transition’s past, present, and future travelers.

TRANSLATION’S PAST {Meet Autumn Marie Rollins}

She is a witty, spunky young lady from Phenix City, Alabama who loves good conversation, Southern food, and dance music. Her bubbly personality is refreshing and her confidence is uplifting, thus making it hard to believe that this 20 year old was once a person who battled low self-esteem. During her grade school years, Autumn felt devalued and inferior to her peers because of her learning disability. She did not believe she was intelligent. She thought she was an unproductive person and that she would never be successful. Because of her dim outlook on her future, her school attendance record was spotty and her grades did not reflect her potential.

However, when Autumn began receiving accommodations, her life began to change. Her sense of worth, attendance, and grades improved (she made A’s and B’s to be exact) after she started leaving class for tests and receiving help after school. Autumn went on to pass the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) and graduate from Russell County High School in 2008 with a standard diploma.

She received another confidence booster when she participated in the Alabama Governor’s Youth Leadership Forum and therefore, today Autumn is a full-time student and employee who has her own apartment. She is a culinary arts major at the Art Institute of Atlanta in Atlanta, Georgia and works at McDonald’s. Her dream is to own a chain of bakeries that caters to people with diabetes, like her mother, Diane Lewis. Though she desires to begin a bakery franchise, Autumn’s ultimate life goal is to start a foundation for teenagers with learning disabilities. She wants these youth to know that their disability does not have to halt or hinder their dreams and she feels that a foundation would be the perfect way to get that message out.

TRANSLATION’S PRESENT {Meet Timothy “Tim” Louis Little}

Tim is a charming, well mannered Opelika High School Bulldog with a contagious smile. This 17 year old Kroger employee has amazing coolness, admirable modesty, and a presence that commands respect. He is a bit reserved, yet, with the mention of science class, drawing, building, or sports, he becomes greatly enthusiastic. This is rightly so since he is a soccer player who has hopes of continuing this sport in college while majoring in either graphic design or engineering.

Surprisingly though, Tim has not always been extremely invested in school. He admits that he did not like school and consequently did not care about academics for a period a time. His learning disability influenced these feelings. Tim’s attitude toward school turned around however after he started receiving accommodations and instruction from a science teacher named Ms. Kriel. His family has also played a major role in his change. Tim reports that extra time and assistance on assignments helps him to be successful in class, as well as knowing that he learns more efficiently during hands on activities, a lesson Ms. Kriel taught him. Moreover, because of the insight Ms. Kriel provided, Tim credits much of his success on the science portion of the AHSGE to her. Lastly, he owes his interest in college to his role models, uncle and aunt Seneca and Jade Allen, both of whom are college graduates.

Presently, Tim is eagerly anticipating his May 2010 graduation, particularly since he has successfully completed all parts of the graduation exam. While awaiting graduation, Tim is searching for college scholarships and preparing college applications for either the University of Alabama at Birmingham or the University of Montevallo. His career goal is to one day own a business in one of the aforesaid fields, thus allowing him complete freedom over his creativity.

TRANSLATION’S FUTURE {Meet Austin Stuart Wentworth}

Austin is an articulate, personable 9th grader at Auburn Junior High School who is pursuing the Alabama High School Diploma with Advanced Academic Endorsement. He is very intellectual and has an unwavering interest in reading and writing. This probably explains why one of his favorite classes is language arts. Austin has lived in Auburn all of his life with his parents Dr. Stuart and Mrs. Julie Wentworth, and like many Auburn residents, he LOVES Auburn football. Besides being intrigued by Auburn football, Austin is a movie fan and a bit of a movie critic. He also enjoys singing in the choir and socializing with his peers.

Unlike some 14 year olds, Austin is fearless of high school. However, he confesses that this has not always been the case. Austin, who has a health impairment, says that transitioning to the eighth grade was not easy and that his first semester of that year was tough socially. Yet, he reports that accommodations helped to ease the social difficulties he was experiencing. Austin also states that the goals on his Individualized Education Program (IEP), as well as accommodations such as copies of notes, extra time on tests, and being able to leave the classroom for tests, helps him to be successful in his coursework. Due to this assistance, Austin does not fear the 10th grade or any grade after that.

Similar to many teenagers, Austin is unsure of his career goals. However, he does desire to attend college, most likely Auburn University. However, the University of Texas is an option, especially since his father is a graduate of the school and because he is named after Austin, Texas. Since he is a movie lover, theater is a potential major. Austin also wants to participate in the Disney College Program. This experience could help him be a valuable employee to any business owner.
Student Spotlight:

A SPECIAL REPORT

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