STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: Meet Kelly Ezell

Every Thursday afternoon, ATLI has the pleasure of working with one of Auburn High School's seniors, Kelly Ezell. Kelly is in the process of completing her community-based training at ATLI. Kelly says she enjoys coming to ATLI because it allows her time outside of school to gain work experience in a new setting. During her time here she assists with different ATLI projects and tasks and has also had the opportunity to sit-in on professional meetings and presentations. Kelly is planning to graduate in May of 2011; after graduation she excitedly states that she would like to attend either Southern Union State Community College or Auburn University for studies in nursing. However, she also shares her love for fashion and shopping along with a dream to one day become a fashion designer. Kelly indicates that she enjoys spending time with family and friends, going to the movies and babysitting her younger sister. Kelly reveals her favorite subjects in school are science and culinary arts. In particular, she especially loves culinary arts because it gives her a chance to better her cooking. A determined and talented young woman, Kelly expresses “sometimes it may take longer for me to do something than others but I know I can do it.”

ATLI director Dr. Karen Rabren and the Institute staff have enjoyed working with Kelly. We wish her much success in the future when preparing for the new responsibilities of young adulthood. ATLI has been very pleased to be a part of Kelly’s training experience and we look forward to hearing of her future success.
“TNT” HELPING PROFESSIONALS and STUDENTS!

Training in Transition, better known as “TNT”, is a series of modules that assists transition professionals and students to better understand and become more knowledgeable about transition policies and practices. The Alabama State Department of Education and ATLI initiated the development of TNT in 2007, starting with Module I: “The Transition Process and the IEP” and Module II: “Assessment for Transition Planning.” Previously, TNT was offered on-site via workshops for transition professionals, then expanded to an online series in 2009, which is accessed on the ATLI website: www.auburn.edu/atli. Periodically, the series is expanded with new updates and additions reflecting the progression of the state and national transition policies and practices.

The newly revised Module I, now called “Foundations of Transition”, and Module II feature a host of exciting new updates and changes that will make the learning experience more interactive and user-friendly. New changes include: visual captions of the transition series in the notes section, mini quizzes after each section to test the participant’s understanding, and a revamped audio/visual experience that will enhance the user’s learning experience. The upcoming modules will continue to build upon the first two, concentrating on the transition process. Module III: “Transition Standards & the IEP” will focus on the individual parts of the Alabama Transition Standards and the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process, with a step-by-step focus on how to plan for transition while developing an IEP. Module IV: “My Plan for Transition” will be the first student-led module from a transition-age student’s point of view and will feature Young Adults in Transition (YAiT), a group of young adults featured on the front page of the previous newsletter.

SITT HOLDS QUARTERLY MEETING IN MONTGOMERY

On November 8, 2010, the quarterly State Interagency Transition Team (SITT) meeting was held in Montgomery, Alabama. The mission of SITT is to promote and assist in the development, coordination, and implementation of activities and services which enhance and facilitate community capacity to support effective transition from school to meaningful adult life for youth and young adults with disabilities. This mission is accomplished by various state agency representatives collaborating as a team to accomplish the goals they set to improve transition in the state of Alabama. As of now, SITT has designated four goals aimed at improving the future of transition in Alabama (see right).

Four sub-teams are each assigned one of the four goals and then assemble and coordinate plans to carry out their goal. A report is given to the entire SITT team sharing their plans and seeking suggestions and feedback on their progress. Each team created “homework” assignments and plans to report on their progress at the next meeting. If you would like to learn more about this interagency collaboration and the work they do, please visit us at www.auburn.edu/atli.

Alabama State Transition Plan Goals

1. Provide the necessary structure and supports to maximize transition students’ skills, knowledge, and experiences of transition;
2. Provide the necessary structure and supports to maximize transition professionals’ knowledge of the transition process;
3. Strengthen SITT to promote inter-agency collaboration throughout the state; and
4. Develop a cross-agency process of data sharing and analysis to improve outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities.

Margaret & Wanda, New SITT Members

Sub-team for Goal 4

Sub-team for Goal 1
PROFESSIONAL MEET & GREET
Introducing Dr. Mabrey Whetstone, Director of Special Education Services

Dr. Mabrey Whetstone is the current Director of Special Education for the State of Alabama. Although he could not imagine working in any field other than Special Education, it was not his first career choice. As an Auburn undergraduate student he was an accounting major until his last semester at Auburn. Needing an elective class, he chose Physical Education for people with intellectual disabilities. After visiting a high school in Opelika and playing volleyball with children with intellectual disabilities, his coach urged him to return the next day to continue interacting with the students. He exclaimed that he enjoyed the experience so much he switched his major that summer and earned a degree that would allow him to work with children receiving special education services. Dr. Whetstone went on to work as a teacher in the Montgomery school system, and shares that he especially cherished his time of working with junior high students.

Since becoming Director of Special Education, he has made many changes that have improved postsecondary outcomes for youth with disabilities. He led the effort to create the Alabama Occupational Diploma program, and declares he is dedicated to maintaining and improving this program so that in the future more students receiving special education services will be able to graduate with a regular diploma. His future plans for transition include developing a course to help students know their options after graduation. He states, “I also want to continue to push the academic abilities of youth with disabilities so more employers and others will notice that they are achieving at higher levels than they have ever achieved.” Dr. Whetstone is passionate about youth succeeding after graduation. In this tough economy he has found alternative methods to traditional job-seeking to help students with disabilities find jobs after high school. His personal messages to students, “Never give up, always push; find out what is important to you as a person. Then push to have others acknowledge that.”

NEW DEAN of the COLLEGE OF EDUCATION VISITS ATLI

On September 30, 2010, Dean Betty Lou Whitford was warmly welcomed by the directors and staff of the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute and Truman Pierce Institute during her first visit to Ramsay Hall. Dr. Whitford was appointed Dean of the College of Education at Auburn University on August 1, 2010, and awarded the prestigious Wayne T. Smith Distinguished Professorship.

During ATLI’s introductory presentation, institute director Dr. Karen Rabren familiarized Dean Whitford with our mission, realized through our numerous projects serving youth and young adults with disabilities, their families, their schools, their service providers, and their communities. The ATLI staff is grateful to Dean Whitford for her interest in our contributions of value to the university through instruction, outreach, and research activities. We look forward to working with her on the many tasks to come and welcome her on many tasks to come and welcome her to the Auburn family. War Eagle!
The East Alabama Area Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (EAACEPD) kicked off National Disability Employment Awareness Month on October 7, 2010 with their annual awards luncheon. This awards luncheon serves as a great opportunity to honor the many outstanding individuals and businesses that have provided employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities in the east Alabama area. Not only are local businesses recognized, but also employees with disabilities who demonstrate excellent performance and attitudes in their jobs. Courtney Dotson, an ATLI staff member and EAACEPD Chair, shares her belief in "honoring individuals who have accomplished a major milestone in their lives," and believes that the committee’s awards luncheon provides that opportunity year after year.

The awards that were given out to these individuals exemplify the meaning of this year's theme for Disability Awareness Month, “Talent Has No Boundaries: Workforce Diversity Includes People with Disabilities.” Two businesses in the Auburn/Opelika area, Cottage Café and the Community Market were recognized for their exceptional cooperation with the students from Opelika and Auburn High Schools. Businesses have worked with these students for several years now and their cooperation is greatly appreciated for continuing the growth of these students and their employment.

Also, it is important to remember the people that work behind the scenes in advocating and helping affect the lives of individuals with disabilities. ATLI is very proud to announce that our outreach coordinator, Diane Glanzer, was awarded “Professional of the Year.” Many more individuals and businesses were recognized at the luncheon, which identifies the many people, students, and businesses within our area that advance awareness of the advantages of hiring people with disabilities. Dotson also stated, "The collaboration among families, community agencies, local businesses, schools, and higher education provides the opportunity for individuals, served by EAACEPD to maintain full participation in society." It was great to see how many people make it possible for individuals with disabilities to be involved and continue to grow in the workforce. This year’s sponsors included ATLI and Mr. Sen’Derrick Marks, a former Auburn University football player who now plays for the Tennessee Titans, who both made significant donations to the committee.

**Important Events**

**HAPPY 2011 from ATLI!!**

**JANUARY**

31 - LTP Summit Registration due.
Go to www.auburn.edu/atli and click on the LTP Summit icon for more information.

**FEBRUARY**

07 - State Interagency Transition Team Meeting
18 - Deadline to register (by mail, fax, internet) for the Alabama Transition Conference, $150 fee.

**MARCH**

Transition Awareness Month in Alabama
7 & 8 - Alabama Transition Conference XXI

**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”).