April Halverson, transition coordinator and special education teacher, and Dr. Stephanie Smith, a former Auburn University graduate student, founded a Young and Adults in Transition (YAiT) group at Opelika High School (OHS). Mrs. Halverson stated that she received support in establishing the YAiT group from the Alabama Department of Education and the staff at OHS.

The most rewarding experience for Mrs. Halverson was seeing the group transfer their advocacy and leadership skills learned during YAiT activities to school and community life. She describes one of her most memorable experiences with OHS's YAiT group as the year the students made posters to display at the Alabama Transition Conference. The students created a poster titled, *Traveling Pants...Where Will Transition Take You?* Seeing the students' hard work on display was very rewarding!

One challenge she reported in starting the group was the amount of time it took to gain the students' trust in the purpose of the group (e.g., to discuss issues associated with having a disability). Additional challenges came with encouraging the students to understand that everyone in the group had something in common in terms of having a disability and challenges in their lives. Mrs. Halverson noted that the students seemed more comfortable over time, as they benefited from having the space to open up in a group where there is no “wrong answer.”

The students in the OHS YAiT group have pairings that facilitate a “buddy system,” giving the students an opportunity to engage in a leadership role within the group. Students are selected because they exemplify the belief that students with disabilities can advocate for themselves. Two ways students of OHS's YAiT group self-advocate is through involvement in their Individual Education Program meetings, and independently submitting their accommodation requests to the teachers. The group also participates in community activities and practices transition and self-advocacy skills.

Mrs. Halverson states that the experience has been rewarding for her in many ways, especially because it affords her the opportunity to get to know the students on a more personal level outside her teaching role.

**Starting a YAiT Group**

Mrs. Halverson’s Advice:

- Don’t let one more thing to do get you down.
- Keep the group manageable.
- Take baby steps—let the group grow each year.
Congratulations to the Collaborative Approach to Training Transition Specialists (CATTS) scholars who successfully hosted the 2012 Community Transition Expo. Transition-related vendors such as Auburn University’s Office of Accessibility, Alabama’s Department of Rehabilitation Services, Special Olympics, and others were lined up on the courtyard; ready to speak with students and their parents about opportunities available that can assist individuals with disabilities as they transition from high school to postsecondary environments.

Auburn Transition Leadership Institute’s own CATTS scholar, Kasey Kaschak was doing what he does best—warming up the crowd with a few laughs prior to the kickoff of the Expo. The Expo opened with Jared Rehm and Darrin Rasey, both athletes who participate in Auburn University’s Adaptive Recreation and Athletics Program. Their message was consistent with the overarching theme of the CATTS Expo—Preparation and Self-Advocacy. Jared shared that most people discounted his dreams of being an athlete, and encouraged him to do the same due to his disability. During the opening address, he encouraged students to take a chance and participate in what they desire and, if there is not a way—find one. He encouraged students to take advantage of opportunities that come their way, regardless if they originally planned on continuing to postsecondary education or entering into a career after high school. The speakers closed by reminding students that there will be people throughout life to help them, help themselves.

The Expo was divided into 3 breakout sessions:
- students interested in career paths;
- students interested in college paths; and
- parent interests.

In the career paths session, CATTS scholars presented on the multiple steps involved in developing a career: discovering interests, researching and applying for jobs, interviewing, maintaining position or work values, and evaluating your progress. In addition, students were directed to explore their interests and were taught a variety of techniques to do so. Students were also taught skills needed to identify possible jobs of interests and social skills needed to excel in these careers.

Another breakout session presented by two scholars was titled, “Welcome to Reality!” This session’s focus, initially created by Dr. Stephanie Smith, Youth and Young Adults in Transition State Advisor, focused on exploring the option of postsecondary education. CATTS scholars, Addie Littrell and Kasey Kaschak solicited responses from students regarding topics which they may likely encounter as they begin to take on increasing responsibilities as youth and young adults (e.g., “do you want to move or stay here; what kind of major are you thinking about pursuing?”). The students enjoyed talking about their future goals for school and employment. This session seemed to be a learning experience for the students. Addie and Kasey presented the students with activities which included an annual and monthly budget. Then, the students were given the opportunity to evaluate and select which luxuries and necessities they could afford (e.g., rent, car payments, clothing, entertainment). This exercise was intended to help the students begin to realize the “reality” of engaging in post-school goals as well as the amount of planning and preparation needed to pursue them.

Judging by attendance, attention to the presenters, and smiling faces, the Expo seemed to be a success.
PROFESSIONAL MEET & GREET
Terri Ever Norris, Transition Coordinator, Monroe County Schools
by George Hall

“Students will rise to our expectations, so we as educators need to set the bar high and expect the best from each of our students.”

Recognizing hard work and dedication!

I enjoy working with high school students because I feel I am actually helping them prepare to become productive citizens in their communities. This year (2012-2013), with my new position as Transition Coordinator, I have had the opportunity to work with students at every grade level. I serve as a job coach to junior and senior students in the county by taking them to different areas in the community where they can job shadow individuals at work. The students learn not only job skills, but also how to interact with others and how to handle conflicts that arise in the work place. The workers at each of these jobs have been wonderful role models and have shown a genuine interest in each of the students.

My opportunity to work with Dr. Rabren at ATLI when I was a student at Auburn allowed me to understand—through hands-on participation—how much research and testing goes into the launch of programs for students with special learning needs. My favorite school program this year is Reality Check! It is a real-life financial simulation, stressing the importance of budgeting, prioritizing spending decisions, and saving money. Our 4th grade students in Monroe County participated in a transition program entitled, Wouldn’t It Be Cool?—designed to broaden their awareness of different jobs and careers, and help them comprehend the connection between what they are learning in school and what they will need to know as successful adults. They also learn to relate to adult role models in addition to their teachers and parents or guardians. The 8th graders have participated in a transition program entitled, Choices, that addresses adolescent issues and provides youth with the skills, self-esteem, and attitudes they need for a rewarding work life.

Of all the wonderful support provided by the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute for practitioners in this state, the most helpful activity to me is the Transition Conference. It is a great connection for school systems across Alabama to be on the same page when serving students with disabilities. It benefits the student most when we are all working in the same directions and doing things the same way.

As educators and instructors, we can derive inspiration even from the challenges we face as we guide students towards success and fulfillment in their lives. The most difficult thing to deal with on a day-to-day basis is student motivation. I have seen so many students with so much potential, but no intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, led to believe they shouldn’t aspire to much. Students will rise to our expectations, so we as educators need to set the bar high and expect the best from each of our students. Personally, I am most inspired by students’ outcomes after high school. It is very rewarding to see a student graduate with a plan—whether it be a job or college. It keeps me going, knowing that in some little way I am making a difference in a student’s life.

Mrs. Norris is an asset to Transition in Alabama and an advocate for students with disabilities. The Auburn Transition Leadership Institute recognizes and thanks Mrs. Terri Evers Norris.
ATLI INTRODUCES THE 2012-2013 STUDENTS IN TRAINING!

by Sadi Fox

The Auburn Transition Leadership Institute (ATLI) continues to host students from Auburn High School for community-based instruction (CBI). CBI offers the students valuable work training experiences that may later transfer to job skills after school.

Fall semester 2012, the students have focused on skills related to assembly work, such as button-making. Associated tasks include paper-cutting, button assembly, quality control, sorting, and counting. Each Tuesday the students report to different workstations depending on their productivity from previous weeks.

After the holidays, the students will return to begin a new CBI work training experience involving paper shredding. ATLI will be collecting data to provide feedback to the student and their teachers as well as throughout this training to further research the use of CBI as a critical component of the educational experience of students with disabilities. Great job to the students for their hard work! War Eagle!

~Building Brighter Futures~