Richard Anderson's journey from high school to work is a story of hard work, dedication, collaboration, partnerships and success. Richard attended Auburn High School and graduated earning the Alabama Occupational Diploma in 2013. While in school, and with the support from his parents, Richard participated in classes and clubs that helped him discover his passion and desire for being a hard worker. Richard attributes his successful transition from high school to work to a team of individuals who all supported him and who helped him throughout his educational journey. Specifically, Richard commented on the role Youth and Young Adults in Transition (YAiT) group played on helping him gain motivation, interview skills, and access to the 2013 Alabama Transition Conference. At the conference, Richard was selected to introduce the keynote speaker!

Currently, Richard is employed with Tiger Dining, a catering vendor at Auburn University. He works full-time at Freshens in Haley Center during the fall and spring semesters and the catering side of Tiger Dining during the summer months. While being employed for over a year and a half, Richard received an award for Outstanding Customer Service. This award speaks directly to Richard’s work ethic and how he interacts with people in every aspect of his life—with a servant’s heart. As a full-time employee with Tiger Dining, Richard noted that he receives benefits, such as free lunch daily at any Tiger Dining restaurant on campus and sick days.

Richard explained that his transition from school to work began while being prepared in high school, where he was introduced to vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. Richard was then connected to the Achievement Center-Easter Seals in Opelika, by his VR counselor. While at the Achievement Center during the...
Karen Jenkins has carved a pathway through her dedication and hard work within the field of transition services. Karen earned both her bachelor’s degree in rehabilitation services and master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling from Auburn University. She currently serves as a rehabilitation specialist III for Alabama’s Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS). Within this position, Karen is the statewide transition coordinator for the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program, coordinator of the Alabama Governor’s Youth Leadership Forum “YLF,” and is a member of the state team for Project SEARCH Alabama initiative.

Karen began her work with individuals with disabilities when she worked at the Fayette/Lamar Arc for one summer. She primarily worked with consumers on employability skills and with a mobile work crew that provided janitorial services to businesses in the area. It was while working at the Arc that she was told about the rehabilitation program at Auburn University. After visiting Auburn and meeting with Dr. Clarence Brown who explained the program to her, Karen stated, “I guess you can say I kind of fell into transition.” During the practicum period of her undergraduate degree, she ended up with a position that she “half-heartedly” considered. It was with Wendy Baker, a special education teacher, at Opelika High School (OHS). When Karen began working at OHS, alongside Wendy and the students, she realized “that was where I needed to be.” Karen also recognized how much she grew to love transition and noted how Wendy is the “best person” she could “have ever learned the heart and spirit of transition from.” After graduating with her bachelor’s degree, Karen took a year off and worked in Montgomery as a jointly funded job coach with two schools. She then pursued her graduate degree and was eventually hired with ADRS in 2001 as a VR counselor. She was assigned to a transition and general caseload in Butler and Crenshaw counties. Over time, she transferred to the Montgomery office in 2002 and served several schools. Later she moved to the state office in 2011, where she currently holds her position.

When asked what contributes to her continuing motivation and drive in the area of transition since working in the field, Karen discussed how work or post-school training is vital for our consumers’ sense of accomplishment and satisfaction with their life. She noted how students exit high school and have challenges adjusting, because they do not have a job or are not pursuing post-school training. Therefore, Karen strongly feels that “it is important to begin working with our consumers during their junior and senior years to prepare them for transitioning into adulthood.” She believes that transition counselors play a vital role in helping consumers identify their vocational strengths and interests, as well as prepare “students to enter adulthood knowing that they can be successful, independent individuals who can work and give back to their communities.”

In projecting what the future holds for the area of transition, Karen hopes for more opportunities to provide services for individuals with significant disabilities. She anticipates seeing changes in their transition program with the enactment of the new legislation, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014. Karen is optimistic that through WIOA, VR will have a more significant role in transition from school to adult life. She has high expectations that such services as job exploration, counseling and guidance, work-based learning experiences, counseling about postsecondary opportunities, job readiness training, and training on self-advocacy will further assist students with disabilities in their transition process.

“...transition counselors play a vital role in helping consumers identify their vocational strengths and interests...”
Similar to the Alabama Transition Conference, James Myrick is celebrating his 25th anniversary of working with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS). In September, James became the assistant commissioner for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services.

When asked how he entered “the arena” of rehabilitation services, James recalled one of the earliest points of transition: his days at college. At Troy University, he was unsure of the exact direction he wanted to take; however, he knew from his past experiences and family interactions that he wanted to work with people with disabilities. He was introduced to the rehabilitation program with a required internship which led him to Montgomery, Alabama. From this great experience, his career started in rehabilitation services. After many years as a residential director in Dothan and the Elk Memorial Center in Montgomery, James joined the ADRS.

After looking back at his career, James smiled and said, “I had no idea when I started this is where I would be...” but, he credits his success to his work ethic, endless dedication, and the passion he receives from serving others within this organization. Over the years, he has been a professional member of the National Rehabilitation Association and the National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns; served as president of the Alabama Rehabilitation Association (ARA); and earned the 2014 Owen F. Wise Award recognized through ARA.

One highlight of his career has been working with students with disabilities. James noted the Alabama Transition Conference as “one of the best in this field, providing updates and continually improving each year.” He also stated, “one-third of the consumers within the rehabilitation caseload are transition age, and the number is continually increasing.” James has witnessed an increased focus on transition at ADRS, and wants to continue to make improvements for students’ outcomes.

James’ unique experiences and meaningful opportunities have shaped his views of rehabilitation. He envisions the future goal for Alabama’s rehabilitation program as simply “service from the heart.” This vision has inspired James to take the word S-E-R-V-I-C-E and given each letter a meaning that instills the values that can help ensure excellent service to consumers, who strive to accomplish their goals in life through services provided by ADRS. James’ primary responsibilities are to ensure that ADRS professionals are meeting the federal and state regulations for rehabilitation services, to deliver appropriate training that addresses the needs within the state, and to review and provide guidance to supervisors and rehabilitation counselors. James embodies the meaning of service, support, and supervision for over four hundred rehabilitation professionals within the general VR program who serve individuals with disabilities in Alabama.

The Auburn Transition Leadership Institute salutes James Myrick on celebrating 25 years of service.

**SERVICE FROM THE HEART**

**SERVE • ENGAGE • REPEAT • VIGILANT • INDUSTRIOUS • COME • ELEVATED**

(presented to ADRS, general VR professionals as the new assistant commissioner)

— J. Myrick
summer of 2013, Richard attended job readiness classes like production training, drivers education, and completing the necessary steps to gain employment. Richard obtained his learner’s permit and is currently working to earn his driver’s license. Also during his tenure at the Center, he was then introduced to the Goodwill Career Center. There he interviewed for his job at Tiger Dining. Richard is interested in earning his driver’s license because he knows that transportation is vital for his employment. He plans to advance in his career once he secures a driver’s license.

Richard is involved in several leisure activities in Auburn. Currently, he is attending a Korean class with his sister. He enjoys biking, playing basketball, cooking, traveling, and attending Auburn University sporting events. Richard also enjoys going to the movies and lunch with his friends. Having a job and making his own money, affords him the resources to enjoy leisure activities and contribute to paying his bills.

When asked what advice he would give to others preparing to go through the transition process, he explained that people should, “...not really worry about their work, because there are people who are on your team and want to help you be successful. These people will help guide you in the right direction.” Richard believes it is important to be dependable and be someone others can count on because working with those you can count on is very important to him.

~Building Brighter Futures~

UPCOMING EVENTS & DATES TO REMEMBER

2015 ALABAMA TRANSITION CONFERENCE
March 2-4 | Updates, visit auburn.edu/atli

MARCH
Transition Awareness Month in Alabama
16: State Interagency Transition Team Meeting
18: Governor Bentley’s Proclamation Signing Ceremony

APRIL
16 – 20: AERA Conference

MAY
5 – 7: 2015 Capacity Building Institute, Charlotte, NC

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 auburn.edu/atli (click on “Resources”).