

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

STEP staff attend a wide variety of workshops and conferences to enable us to keep current on issues that affect children with disabilities and their families. We use this information to enhance the information packets and workshop materials and when answering individual questions. This newsletter segment will highlight conference information that STEP staff identified as particularly high quality and of great interest. Enjoy!



Plan A Perfect Life: How is Your Balance?

Transition to life after school is a "hot topic" right now and believe me with my daughter Sarah turning 18 in a couple weeks, it is on my mind all the time. I attended a session at the state Special Education Conference and found this tool to be extremely helpful.

Representatives from the Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services are happy to share an effective, useful career planning tool, Plan a Perfect Life. The Excel program was presented by DRS staff at the Special Education Annual Conference in Nashville earlier this year. The audience response was quite enthusiastic and as a result, Plan a Perfect Life (with instructional manual) was distributed among participants for use in classrooms across the state.

Check out our website at www.tnstep.org to download the Excel program and manual. You will be glad you did!



By K. Harrison

Alternative Pencils

A recent conference put on by the PTI in North Carolina (ECAC) focused on how disability affects writing. Writing is a challenge faced by many students with speech, sensory and motor difficulties, which results in limited opportunities to write. The Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, UNC at Chapel Hill have developed a variety of "alternative pencils." These "pencils" provide students with significant disabilities access to the alphabet to use for very emergent writing activities.

I was very impressed by a color coded Eye Gaze Frame that allowed a student who had never been able to express himself to learn to write his thoughts. As he gazed at each letter on the board a transcriber wrote it down and showed it to him. She used lots of verbal praise. "Good job, you wrote and A". Using specific teaching strategies it was demonstrated how this student's writing emerged. At the conclusion it showed this student writing through eye gaze about his mom taking a trip and it was going to be "me and dad" and wrote over and over. How exciting it was to see this student able to express what was on his mind.

Six types of alternative pencils have been developed to support different students' sensory and physical abilities in manipulating the alphabet. To learn about these visit www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds Look for [Case Studies from the Deaf-Blind Model Demonstration Project](#). At the end of that paragraph you will see links to Jake and Matthew's story. Click on their names to see the video.

What An Inspiration!

By Donna Jennings

The Tennessee Disability Mega Conference was spectacular again this year. I attended a variety of sessions; however, one session in particular made a great impact on me. It was very inspirational as well as informative. Mike May presented on the (GPS) Global Positioning System. In his session, details were given on how cutting edge navigation technologies, GPS cell phones and databases present opportunity for those who are blind or have other visual disabilities. Mike is the President and CEO of a company that produces the Sender GPS system which has developed audible technology and software that allows people to "see" locations for street signs, building names, bus stops, and talking ATM's, etc. Hikers can get a detail of their surroundings, and students can locate buildings on campus. There is a database that shares information about locations. He stated in his session that "People Finder" is his next venture.

Mike, who became blind at age three, has been recognized for breaking world records in downhill speed skiing; he was acknowledged by Ronald Reagan after the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympics as being the first blind skier. He obtained a Master's Degree from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Mike has worked at the Central Intelligence Agency, and is a successful inventor, entrepreneur, and family man with two children. He has met several presidents and a vice president. He has been windsurfing, waterskiing, parachuting, and has traveled abroad to Africa and Europe. A stem cell transplant in 1999 enabled or Mike to regain sight. You can learn more about his adventures in a book written by Robert Corson called "Crashing Through", which tells of the risk and adventures of one man's journey from blindness to sight. A movie of his life has also been made. If you would like to learn more about Mike Mays' pioneering efforts, and the product types of GPS technology, go to their website at: www.sendergroup.com.



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Making Sense of New Early Intervention Guidelines

By Jamie Kilpatrick, Director of Early Childhood Programs and
Ruth Wiseman, Public Awareness Coordinator

Tennessee's Early Intervention System, or TEIS, is a program within the Division of Special Education of Tennessee's Department of Education. It is the state's voluntary educational program for families with children birth through two years of age with qualifying disabilities or developmental



delays. In 2006, TEIS underwent a policy analysis at the request of the Department of Education. The analysis was lead by the Governor's Office of Children's Care Coordination (GOCCC) and supported by the Department of Education and the Division of Special Education. The outcomes and recommendations of this report are located on the TEIS website <http://www.TN.Gov/education/teis> . The 138 page GOCCC reform document laid the foundation and steps for the Reform of TEIS. The Reform was lead by the Office of Early Childhood, Division of Special Education's new director, Jamie Kilpatrick.

October 1, 2007 was a new day for Tennessee's Part C system. Nine State Point of Entry offices were established from Johnson City to Memphis and staffed with state personnel. The criterion for eligibility was equalized, creating consistency for all families interested in TEIS across the state. Since its inception in 1989, TEIS has developed its first Operations Manual and Public Policies, which assist to provide an equitable administration of the system. These have been developed with technical assistance from federal resources and with consultation from other states.

Part C mandates that states provide transition planning to assist families in preparing for the transition from Part C at age three to another system, program, or environment. TEIS continues to stress the importance of timely transition planning through training, monitoring, and communication between TEIS and the Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

On a fiscal note, TEIS is no longer on unstable fiscal footing, something that the program has experienced for many years. The program is also no longer under conditional federal funding, as the lack of Payment Policies has been resolved. This was a problem cited by the Office of Special Education Programming (OSEP) for years. Another positive fiscal note is that TEIS has provided seed monies to local programs in Memphis and Knoxville, with the intent of designing stronger programs for families and children affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder. Another TEIS initiative will ease the referral process for children involved with substantial cases of abuse or neglect into Part C. TEIS also continues to offer Part C support for group intervention, a service most states do not allow. These positive advancements in TEIS have been accomplished while fulfilling a promise to not institute family fees, something that has been done by almost every other state for years (see www.nectac.org for individual state's information).

The TEIS staff, along with state vendors and related community agencies are motivated and committed in making TEIS a strong, viable, and innovative program for years to come. Please visit <http://www.TN.Gov/education/teis> for brochures, vendor information, the Analysis Report, and other information Tennessee's Early Intervention System or call 1-800-852-7157.



We are Cooking up an Event you don't Want to Miss!



In the fall a STEP Transition Institute will be held in Memphis! Information will be presented from a wide range of agencies and workshop topics will include in-depth planning strategies for developing Transition Plans and information you need to become familiar with options for life after high school. Workshops will be done in Spanish and English! To be placed on a list to receive further information about this event, email information@tnstep.org and just put **TRANSITION IN MEMPHIS** in the subject line or call 1/800-280-7837 and ask to be added to the list.