

*Life After High School:
The Next Chapter*

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Introduction

This book is a collection of stories of eight young adults in Kentucky. Their backgrounds are diverse. Their journeys are personal. They do share one common thread; they are each actively pursuing the lives they want to live. Several of the chapters will highlight a connection with education that students have made when high school comes to a close. We know that education pays off in terms of employment, and furthering one's education, be it through college or technical school, is an option that many young people in Kentucky choose.

Whether you are a student, a family member, or anyone who has ever aspired to get everything that life has to offer, we hope that you will enjoy this glimpse into the lives of other students who have left high school behind and begun the next chapters of their own lives.

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Accepting the Challenge

The phrase ‘she can do it’ has been a constant theme for Megan’s life. From the moment of her birth when the doctors told her parents that she had Down syndrome, every time someone said, “Megan can’t,” her family, her determination, and her dedication showed instead that, “yes, she can.”

As the youngest of six children, Megan was held to the same expectations as the rest of her siblings. She was expected to take music lessons, to participate in sports, and to make good grades. Megan’s parents always expected her to accomplish every milestone, but also understood that she would accomplish these things at her own pace, and often times in a unique way.

Megan says, “The best thing my parents did for me was to treat me like they did my brothers and sisters.”

Megan’s parents admire her many gifts and talents. They describe her as gifted with memory and focus. Whenever Megan runs into some sort of roadblock, it is important for those in her life to take a step back and realize that it is not that Megan is unable to do it, but she may need to use a different way to accomplish the task.

Megan’s mother explains, “We ask if it is because we’re not presenting it [the task] in a way that makes sense to her.”



Once the challenge is identified, Megan's parents and others who are close to her come up with strategies and alternatives for Megan to achieve success.

For example, when it came to Spanish class, Megan did well all year long. She studied hard and knew most all the material. She was fully prepared for the final exam. So why did she fail it? Instead of focusing on the fact that Megan failed the test, her parents and teacher focused on the fact that she had the ability to score well. The teacher agreed to test Megan again, this time asking the questions in a different way. The second time, Megan scored 138 points out of 140 and only took 45 minutes to complete the exam. What made the difference? By taking the time to think about Megan's abilities, they realized that the first final was given using a bubble answer form. Megan's vision made it difficult for her to process the small bubbles and she wasn't able to fill in the answer correctly. Because of this experience, Megan's accommodations at school were changed so that she no longer had to take any exams using a bubble sheet.

In Spanish II, Megan encountered another challenge. The teacher said that Megan wasn't paying attention in class. Another student in the class told Megan's parents that the teaching method being used was difficult for everyone, and offered to help Megan learn a different way. After working together with her classmate, Megan finished the class with an A. The important lesson here was the need to be flexible in teaching styles and to use the power of peer supports.

In the 8th grade, Megan decided that she knew what she wanted to be when she grew up: an occupational therapy assistant. Her family made sure Megan knew that to achieve this goal, she would have to make good grades, be accepted into college and then into an Occupational Therapy Assistant professional program. Megan accepted the challenge. In fact, she

went to school early each morning, so that she could do extra studying to boost her knowledge. She used a computer program for math and sciences that would help her gain an even better understanding of the subjects, and she worked with tutors every day after school.

Megan's transition from high school to college was a team effort that started when she was in the tenth grade.

Megan explains, "I attended these meetings when I could. I made sure that my transition team knew my goals."

During high school, Megan continued to work hard toward her goal of going to college. She took the health science courses for two years at the local technical school and studied anatomy, physiology, medical terminology, along with CPR and first aid to prepare her for future college courses.

"I really enjoyed the courses because I was able to talk to my parents about medical stuff!" said Megan, referring to the fact that both her parents are doctors.

Megan also made an A in each of the courses for both years. As a high school senior, Megan gained important experience as she shadowed at a private practice that specialized in occupational and speech therapies. That same practice hired Megan as a part-time office assistant after she graduated from high school, giving her real world work experience. This was important so that Megan could work on building a strong and competitive resume.

Megan graduated from high school in 2007 with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.75. She was honored as a Governor's Scholar for four years based on her outstanding academic work. Megan was then accepted into the local community college to continue pursuing her dream. She sat for a placement exam in place of the SAT and the counselors determined she needed to take one remedial math and four remedial English courses before

enrolling in college classes. It was decided that she take two courses a semester while continuing to work part-time.

“The biggest accommodation I receive in college is to be allowed to have academic support in the classroom. I have an academic coach who goes to class with me. I take my own notes but the academic coach takes down notes as well, and then gives me private instruction so that I comprehend the subject matter fully and am able to keep up with the class work. This service is partly paid for by...Vocational Rehabilitation and it has made a big difference for me,” said Megan.

Megan has completed all of the remedial courses in math and English, and has begun taking college credits. She is doing well in the college level courses and even completed the Anatomy and Physiology course with a B. She is also enrolled in an internship as a teaching assistant at a local preschool.

Megan says, “I started volunteering at Growing Together as a teacher’s assistant in the fall of 2009. This is a preschool program that includes both typical children as well as children with disabilities. This semester, I am continuing as a volunteer and this will count towards an internship through the Experiential Learning Program for which I will receive college credit! I love working with the children and helping the teachers!”

In addition to all of her academic work, Megan also participates in a variety of extracurricular activities. Megan has been a gymnast since she was seven years old and joined the Special Olympics Gymnastics team at age eight.

“I participated in the Special Olympics World Games held in Dublin, Ireland in Level 4 gymnastics in 2003 and won five medals!” says Megan.

She has been a flier (the person at the top of the human pyramid!) for the Show Cats Special Olympic Cheerleading Squad for eight years and has won first place every year at the

Atlanta competition. Megan began swimming at age three and joined the Special Olympics swim team in 2003.

Megan said, “I participated at the Special Olympic World Games held in Shanghai in the fall of 2007 as a swimmer and I won two medals.” She takes piano lessons and even homemaking lessons where she learns skills for grocery shopping, meal planning, and cooking. Megan also serves as a global messenger for the Special Olympics of Kentucky, as an advocate for postsecondary education for those with intellectual disabilities, and serves on the board of the University of Kentucky chapter for the organization Best Buddies, that works to improve social interactions between typical peers and individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Megan’s father says, “I cannot express how much Megan has helped me see the world differently and better. She has brought remarkable friends, and mentors, and teachers into our lives and seems, somehow, to have enriched theirs.”

On November 8, 2010, Megan testified at the state capitol to the Legislative Education Sub-Committee as a part of a presentation on postsecondary education for individuals with intellectual disabilities. One of the state senators asked her to keep the legislators informed of her progress as she works towards her college degree. He said that her presentation was a true eye opener in seeing how successful individuals with intellectual disabilities can be in college.

Some aspects of college life have been tough. Even though her days are full with classes, studying, work, and lots of activities, Megan longs for typical college friends who she can hang out with and share in the college experience. But sometimes, it’s tough to juggle all of the things that she wants to accomplish.

Megan says, “I know that I have a long way to go to make my dream come true...but I hope that someday I will be employed

full-time...working with children.” Megan’s advice for others is to focus on what you want to achieve and then find the pathways to make it happen. “I hope that I have shown you that with the necessary support services, people with cognitive disabilities can continue higher education and that it can improve the opportunity to get the job you want.”

Like many college students, Megan is also thinking about other possible career paths that will enable her to fulfill her dream of teaching young children. Her current work as a pre-school assistant at an elementary school has been so rewarding that Megan is now considering switching her major from occupational therapy assistant to obtaining her two-year teacher associate degree. No matter which major Megan ultimately chooses, she will succeed and she will realize her dream of working with children. For her, the words are always, “I CAN!”

Finding Her Future

From an early age, Lucyhart knew that she wanted to go to college. “I thought I would have a normal life, like my sister,” she says.



But the expectations that others had were different for Lucy, who was born with cerebral palsy, and later developed a seizure disorder. She believes that she may have been injured at birth, when the umbilical cord wrapped around her neck. Lucy experienced multiple seizures from the age of four until she was seven. On May 13, 1988, a radical surgery was performed at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital.

“They removed half of my brain,” says Lucy, now a capable self-advocate and college student at age 30.

The surgery, called a hemispherectomy, involved removing all four lobes of the left side of her brain, and was one of the first such operations of its kind. Afterward, Lucy received a variety of services, including physical, speech, and occupational therapy. “I had to learn to walk and talk again; I couldn’t use my right hand or leg at all.” Lucy has not had a seizure since the operation.

Born in Versailles, Kentucky, Lucy grew up in and around Midway. She didn’t especially like these small towns. “Everyone was in each other’s business too much.”

School was difficult, not so much due to the curriculum, but because she felt that being labeled as a person with a disability

made having friendships with other students difficult. Lucyhart graduated from Woodford County High School in Versailles in 2000.

“They said I would never go to college,” she says, referencing the predictions of both her doctors and her parents.

While her older sister attended Yale and Harvard Divinity, Lucy earned a certificate in child care at the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center. She worked in a number of child care facilities, but found that her ambitions lay in another area.

“I’d like to work in an office,” she says.

Soon she will begin looking for a job as an administrative assistant. Ideally, she would like to work for medical practitioners, keeping records and answering the phones. Lucy’s job history shows a willingness to embrace a wide variety of tasks. In addition to child care centers, her employers have included Wal-Mart stores in Louisville and Lexington. Her duties included stocking multiple departments, cashiering, and training new associates. She worked at a Lexington Wal-Mart for over two years, and was recognized by her supervisors for her superior customer service skills.

For the past two years, Lucy has attended classes at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. With the support of Kentucky’s Postsecondary Inclusion Partnership (PIP), a project that helps students with disabilities succeed in college, she has maintained a grade point average (GPA) of 3.429, and is working toward a Certificate in Office Systems Technology.

“My parents are proud of me,” she says, “They say I am getting better grades than they did in college!” It has been important to Lucy to “prove to myself that I can do it and not be afraid because of my disability.”

Lucy is ready to prove more still. The next phase of Lucy’s journey will entail a change of residence. Currently, she lives in a

group home in central Kentucky, along with two other women with disabilities and rotating staff. Having gained confidence through her success at college, she is ready to address this aspect of her life which she feels no longer meets her needs.

“They treat us like three year olds,” she says of the staff.

Lucy has her own car, but is not allowed to use it in bad weather.

“When the vans [serving the group home] are grounded, my car is grounded, too. They tell us where we can eat, how we can spend our money. We aren’t allowed to share food or buy birthday gifts for each other. But you see this?” Lucy touches the silver snowflake necklace she is wearing. “A guy that lives in the program with me [in a different house run by the same agency] gave me this for Christmas.”

Other aspects of group home living have proven less than satisfactory. “When something goes wrong, you have to call maintenance. It takes them a month or two. I just got hot water in my shower [after two years].”

The final straw for Lucy came when her computer, phone, and car were impounded for an extended period. “I did something on the computer that I shouldn’t have done,” Lucy says.

She admits that she made a mistake, and it is not something she will do again. But she is also an adult and should be treated as such. “They took everything,” she says, “That isn’t right.” She adds that her mother was also displeased with the way the situation was handled.

Lucy has found an apartment where she would like to live, and with the support of her mother and case manager, she will be leaving the group home shortly. Until then, she will continue to participate in the “structured group activities” arranged by staff—scavenger hunts, shopping trips, and “Fun Friday” outings.

“They usually aren’t much fun,” Lucy adds.

She will also continue studying English, computer skills and medical terminology, working steadily toward her goals.

When she is not studying, Lucy enjoys reading, especially books by James Patterson and Nora Roberts. She also likes shopping with her mom and spending time with her two year old niece, Norahart. “She’s named after me,” Lucyhart says proudly.

Hart is a family name, one of several passed down by a family steeped in tradition. Lucy has other plans for her future family.

“No, I won’t keep the Hart” she says, “I like the name Star for a girl.” While she loves her family and respects her history, Lucyhart knows that “the way things have always been” is not necessarily the way of her future.

The Ultimate Artist

On Thursday at 9:00 AM, the phone call comes.

“Are you coming to the PIP HQ today?”

“Yes, please.”

“I’ll see you in ten minutes.”

The call is exactly the same each Thursday. Silas is a man who appreciates routines and ritual. On

Thursdays, he comes to the offices of the Postsecondary Inclusion Partnership (PIP) to work on his art, pencil drawings of creatures, half human/half rat, modified stegosaurus, and a tiger/lion/leopard hybrid among others. Silas is known for his drawings and his rich imagination, but what he is doing now is something different. Something more.

The drawings Silas is working on today have been commissioned by local science fiction author, Cathy Benedetto. In the process of creating her series, she decided that she would hire an illustrator to depict her characters. She saw a few sketches by Silas and thought he would be perfect for the job. There were some skeptics, and understandably so. Drawing well from one’s own imagination is a skill few possess, but bringing to life the imaginings of another person requires talents far beyond drawing. A collaboration of this sort demands, in addition to raw talent, patience, persistence, and what employers tend to call “excellent communication skills.”



One look at Silas' records and the observations others have made about him throughout his 21 years might suggest that he has none of these qualities. As a child, Silas was diagnosed with a severe speech delay and mild intellectual disability. Throughout elementary and high school, he received special education services. His mother was told not to set high expectations for her child. She describes her efforts to access vocational services to prepare for Silas' future as a constant battle.

"One person actually told me, 'he won't be able to work,'" she reported.

His mother's efforts did result in some action. Silas had been receiving services from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) for some time. However, his only work experience was stocking shelves at a grocery store. He had also volunteered in the offices at Tates Creek High School. There, he assisted a counselor whom he credits with encouraging him to continue his artwork and test his limits.

"She worked with me on my confidence," he said.

In his first meeting with PIP director, Jeff Bradford, Silas didn't say much; his mother did most of the talking, along with Silas' brother, Gary. Jeff and the other PIP staff had no trouble understanding who Silas was and what he wanted, however. The portfolio he displayed told the story. Here were sketches of superheroes, some well known and others inventions of Silas' imagination. Some were self portraits, Silas as warrior and wizard. When asked what he wanted to learn in college, he replied that his goal was to be "the ultimate artist." Silas had begun drawing at the age of four, and had won awards for his art at Lexington Traditional Magnet School. Art has always been his passion.

From an early age, Silas had wanted to go to college. With the support of the PIP, he enrolled in Bluegrass Community and

Technical College (BCTC) in the spring of 2009. His first class was in Photoshop design; he received an A. For his second semester, Silas enrolled in two classes, one in drawing and the other an experiential education course which allowed him to earn credit by working in a local business. His interest in art and comics led to his first internship with *A Plus Comics* in Lexington. There Silas worked on organizing old stock, store and product maintenance, and customer relations; he also learned general business skills, while enjoying connections with others who shared his interests. Silas never missed a day of work, and received excellent ratings from his supervisor. During the same semester, Silas exhibited artwork at Lexington's Kentucky Theatre during a PIP promotional event which drew nearly 300 spectators.

At the start of his second year in college, Silas stepped out of his comfort zone to enroll in an academic skills course. He received tutoring services at school, and PIP staff assisted with extra tutoring help when needed. Silas faced a significant challenge at midterm when he was required to make an oral presentation about someone he admired. Silas had made strides in his reading and writing skills, but speaking in front of a class was an experience he dreaded. The day before the presentation, he practiced his speech multiple times with as many people as he could find to listen. His persistence paid off nicely—he earned a score of 98% for his presentation about PIP's director, Jeff Bradford.

Silas is less reserved than he used to be. He enjoys spending time with many friends who belong to the University of Kentucky's chapter of Best Buddies. He has over 600 friends on Facebook, and well known bodybuilders are frequent visitors to his Facebook fan page, where he displays his tributes to them. He has also started a new work experience at *Hands On Originals*, a

Lexington business that makes custom printed apparel. Most recently, Silas earned his Kentucky driver's license. He looks forward to working and earning the money to buy his own car.

"The PIP program is a great inspiration to me and my success," says Silas.

He most enjoys the confidence and academic freedom he has found at BCTC. His advice for students who are just starting college is straightforward. "It's important to keep a positive attitude, pursue your goals, and try to achieve them the best way you can. Be patient, and good things will come to you," he adds, "Family is the most important thing ... We'll break through any obstacles that stand in our way." With Silas as an example, this is not at all difficult to believe.

Artwork by Silas Jones will appear in the second volume of the trilogy, The Eyes of Sandala, by Cathy Benedetto, to be published in 2011 by Bearhead Publishing, Louisville, Kentucky.

Writing Her Own Next
Chapter

Julia has a “touch of Down syndrome”. This is how the doctor described Bill and Meg’s newborn daughter. None of the prenatal tests indicated that there were any issues, but Meg felt something was different during her pregnancy. When the diagnosis was finally delivered it came only with doom and gloom. Doctors had nothing good to say about Julia’s future, and told her parents all of the things that she would never be able to do.

One doctor just kept repeating, “Thank God my boys are all normal.”

The social worker who came into the hospital room soon after Julia was born told her parents that all they needed to do was sign a piece a paper and Julia would go away for good. Her parents at no point had indicated that they did not want Julia and she was in the room with them as much as possible; the family was bonding. When Julia was placed in the hospital nursery, she was not allowed to be with the other babies. At first they were told that Julia did not have a heart defect, a major medical concern with children with Down syndrome, only to later find out that she did. It is fair to say that all of the information provided to the family



immediately after Julia's birth did not give them much hope for their newborn daughter's future.

Exactly a week after Julia was born, her father was transferred to New York. Due to the transfer, Julia had the surgery to repair her heart defect in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The attitude of the staff at the children's hospital in Pittsburgh could not have been more different from the attitude of the staff were Julia was born. They were very positive and encouraging about Julia's future and introduced the family to a Down syndrome support group. The surgery was a success and Julia has not had any residual effects from her congenital heart defect.

Julia was walking independently by the time she was 18 months old, but she never crawled. The professionals involved with her early intervention treatment told her mother that she needed to make Julia crawl. Julia would not crawl, not even after her mom showed her that the baby book said that she was supposed to crawl before she walked. Julia wanted to do it her way.

The family moved back to Kentucky a few years later. They met with the elementary school that Julia would be attending when she was three years old just to introduce themselves and to let them know that Julia was coming. Despite their efforts to be proactive, Julia's first days of kindergarten did not go well. After 19 school days, Julia was diagnosed with clinical depression and her mother took her out of school. After an Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) meeting that involved the family hiring a lawyer, Julia went back to school and was provided with a classroom aide. This was just the beginning of Julia and her parents advocating for Julia's best interests at school and beyond.

A few years later, her mother decided that Julia might be able to learn to read. After some convincing, the school agreed and now Julia loves books. Julia's family hopes that the battles that

they have fought have made things better not just for Julia, but also for other children. The family was well known in the school system and her parents have both been very involved. Her father has served on the site-based decision making council and her mother was involved in school activities for both Julia and her older sister Kate. Overall, Julia's school experience had its ups and downs, but she has still exceeded the expectations that the professionals presented to her parents when she was born.

Julia's father is a member of the Opportunity College Advisory Board. This group meets to create postsecondary opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities. Julia was one of the first students who were dually enrolled at Bluegrass Community and Technical College while still a student in the Fayette County Public School System. One of the expectations that Julia's family had was that Julia would have a job when she finished school. Now 19 years old, Julia is in her final year of high school. Earlier in high school Julia worked at the Child Development Centers of the Bluegrass where she had also been a student as a young child. Julia much preferred going to school on the days that she knew she would also be going to work. Julia began working at another daycare in town and they loved her and the work she did. The problem is that Julia will not be receiving a high school diploma which means that she cannot be hired as a regular employee at any daycare.

The next work experience for Julia was at Joseph-Beth Booksellers. At the time, it was not considered ideal, but everyone was willing to give it shot. Julia ended up liking the work and the manager loved having her. Soon Julia was offered a paying position at the bookstore and currently works there two days a week.

“I never thought we would get here,” said Julia’s mother of Julia’s first paycheck. Julia loves her work and is proud of the job she does.

Like most 19 year old teenagers, Julia’s future is not set in stone. She is considering postsecondary options with the help of Kentucky’s Supported Higher Education Project. And now that she has positive work experience under her belt, she already has something important to add to her resume. These experiences will only make her more competitive in the job market. If she combines that work with further education, she will have a one-two punch to help her get and keep a career she finds rewarding and interesting. Stay tuned for Julia’s next chapter!

Jeremy

*Fun? Work? Volunteer?
Family? Why Choose?*

Jeremy accomplishes in any one given week what it seems like it should take anyone else a month's time. This active, energetic, outgoing young man is a band member, group leader, and Olympian. He also happens to have



Down syndrome. His energy is contagious and his outlook on life is incredibly positive. Jeremy has never been treated differently by his mother. She is by far his number one fan and advocate. She spoke of some early struggles that affected his family life. She has raised Jeremy as a single parent from birth. She describes her son as a leader who commands the attention of others, and this was obvious upon meeting Jeremy. On any given day, Jeremy can be found hanging out with his friends. He could easily be described as the life of the party and he likes organizing activities for himself and his friends. He enjoys art and is quite creative at making pottery, drawing and painting pictures, and decorating cultural pieces. He even won an award for an African tribal mask he created for a Special Olympics art show. Art is not the only recreational activity he enjoys, however. Jeremy started his own band and loves playing the drums with his friends and for others. He says he is still learning music, but feels it is one more creative avenue for him.

When Jeremy is not creating art, he enjoys competitive alpine skiing, basketball, track and field events, soccer, bowling, and softball. He won two bronze medals in the long jump and 4x100 relay race at the USA National Special Olympic Games held in Ames, Iowa. He is very proud to have been a representative on the Kentucky Team for Special Olympics and plans to return to the games in the future with the same competitive spirit. Jeremy stays in contact with the many friends he has made locally and nationally through these events. His mother also said that his friends' parents have become her friends too, and that they all are able to be a network of support for one another. Jeremy says that he really enjoys being a part of a team and being a leader on the many teams of which he is a part.

Jeremy's mother feels that many of the friends Jeremy has are directly related to the activities in which he participates. He has taken friends to school dances that he met through community events and loves eating with his friends at local establishments for these special occasions. Jeremy even took dance lessons before attending his first dance and found his love for dance and music. Jeremy and his mother are both very grateful for the experiences and opportunities they have been afforded by becoming involved in community organizations. Jeremy's mother mentioned that she feels the networking opportunities afforded by these organizations have been one of the strengths in Jeremy's success.

Although Jeremy is very busy with his extracurricular activities, he still finds time to maintain steady work. He has worked at the local Movie Tavern for almost two years and has made many new friends and allies at his job. He received training from his job coach who helped him learn his job duties, and he continues to receive additional training when his manager asks him to learn new tasks. He is proud to be able to complete

typical movie theater employee duties while also having the added responsibilities of restaurant skills, such as serving meals to patrons at the Movie Tavern.

As if all of this isn't enough, Jeremy also volunteers with another friend at the Veterans Administration Medical Center two days a week. He does many office oriented tasks and visits with the residents while making sure they are served snacks and kept comfortable. He is also a volunteer usher at his church, and he and his mother feel that faith has been an integral part of their journey together. Jeremy also attends Camp PALS in Radnor, Pennsylvania every summer. This is a camp for young adults with Down syndrome. He really became interested in sports through the camp. He and his mother feel that he was able to try many different sports there and really find a love for being outdoors and being active. At Camp PALS, Jeremy participates in art activities, swimming, water sports, singing, and recreational games. He never failed to attend the events that were offered to him and has been very open to try new experiences. His openness and willingness to try new things has definitely contributed to him finding his love of sports and art.

His mother said that she never treated Jeremy as a person with Down syndrome. She explains, "This world doesn't seem to care if you have a disability or not. The expectations for a person at each stage of life are the same."

Because of this, she does not limit him to only those activities which others say are within his abilities. She has never said no to him when he has asked to participate in something and always finds a means for him to have the experiences that he desires. She is currently working on ways to teach Jeremy to drive and is researching different kinds of technology on vehicles which may allow him to better steer through hand control devices.

Jeremy encourages everyone to become his friend and get to know him. He and his mother feel that their social network of friends that they have gained over the years has been their main source of support and enjoyment in their lives. They are both very strong in their faith and are grateful for the many opportunities they have had to experience life together. Jeremy's mother encourages other families with children with disabilities to try a variety of games, events, and organizations. She says that having more friends and social networks to be a part of will only enhance a person's life experience!

A Typical College Student

“Katie, what’s the plan for the rest of the day?”

Katie squints her eyes and thinks for a second, then responds methodically, “Ballet. Go to the store. Go back home. Get ready. Go out. Do math homework. Go to bed. Get up. Go to school.”



Sounds like a typical college student schedule, doesn’t it? Well, Katie is a typical college student. She attends Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC), lives in a dorm, and spends her free time hanging out with friends or studying, in that order. Katie knew she wanted to go to college for a lot of different reasons. Her sisters had both attended college, and Katie knew that she would need a college education to get the career she wanted. She is also extremely athletic, and sports are a big part of college life in Lexington. Last spring, Katie got the opportunity to do experiential education with the University of Kentucky women’s basketball team and the University of Kentucky football team. Exactly what Katie’s career may be is still up for debate, but that’s what college is for, isn’t it? Right now, her interests in sports and kids seem to be pointing her in the direction of being an athletic trainer or physical educator in the schools.

To start getting ready for that career, she plans to gain some work experience while she’s still in school.

This summer, she'll get her first job. "I've never had a job before. I will soon. I'm kind of nervous."

Katie reflects on jobs that might have been available to her without college, "I'd probably work at the Subway... which is really sad."

Describing the changes in her life since starting college, Katie starts slowly, "At home I watched TV. Now I watch movies."

The seemingly frivolous observation parallels key changes in Katie's life. The story line is more complex now, occurring across a variety of settings. The action is less predictable. There are more characters, too.

Katie moved into the dormitory when she started taking classes. She wanted the full college experience, and for many students, that means living on campus. There were the usual concerns about moving away from home and living in a dorm, but the folks working with Katie from the Postsecondary Inclusion Partnership (PIP), found the Wesley House, a dormitory that houses 24 women and 24 men in downtown Lexington. Students living at the Wesley House go to different colleges in Lexington, but come together to share meals, fellowship and fun. The sense of community that Katie describes is building a strong foundation for her college years. She and her dorm-mates eat out, go to movies, host events, and rent movies.

Right now, English and math take up much of her time. But it's math that requires lots of extra study. Katie works with tutors to make sure that she is keeping up with the concepts. Her grade point average is a 3.0, showing that she knows how to play hard and work hard. Katie also has a new boyfriend.

"He's a nice Christian man. We have the same things in common. We love to work out. We love sports. He goes with the flow. He doesn't care what I wear. Tonight we're going out."

He also happens to be a teaching assistant in the physics department. “He’s crazy smart,” she says.

Katie continues, “We hung out and got to know each other. We were buddies for a while [before we] dated. We just liked each other.”

While he cooks meals for her (once it was buffalo!) and helps her learn math, Katie is the more socially outgoing of the pair. “I love my social life,” she says.

Each Monday night, she and her friends attend a program at Wesley called Monday Night Fuel.

“Everybody gets together to worship and eat. Different area churches do the meal every time.”

Katie’s friends describe her as “very extroverted, social, and fun.”

“She’s full of joy, funny, athletic, willing to try new things,” says Postsecondary Inclusion Partnership director, Jeff Bradford. Bradford adds that he doesn’t hear a lot from Katie. “She’s very independent” and has a lot of friends.

Katie’s mother sees another side of her. “She struggles with a little bit of anxiety with new and unfamiliar situations,” but she is very “giving, hardworking, and full of determination.”

Of Katie’s journey to college, she notes, “It was scary for her dad and myself. I know now that she is going to be ok. I’m very glad to see her gaining her independence because that’s what it’s all about in life.” She pauses and then continues, “For everybody.”

Chad

Love What You Do

Perceptive. That is the word that Susan uses to describe her son, Chad. While some people may tend to focus on Chad's disability and his cognitive difficulties, it is clear to those close to Chad that he pays very close attention to details. Chad has an excellent memory for important events in the lives of others. For example, he always



remembers peoples' birthdays and has a knack for always picking the perfect gift. He really connects each person's interests with the perfect gift for the occasion. This is a particular talent of Chad's.

Born with a heart problem that threatened his life early on, Chad's chances of survival were not good. Chad's parents were told that he would most likely not live a long life. Chad underwent a series of surgeries at the University of Alabama Birmingham hospital to correct the problem with his heart. Despite the serious odds that were stacked against him, Chad survived and now thrives without the aid of medication and only annual heart exams.

Chad was also born with Down syndrome. Chad's parents were determined from the start to make sure Chad was given the same opportunities as any other child. Before his birth, Chad's parents had high expectations for him. This didn't change when

he was diagnosed with Down syndrome. They were confident that with the proper support, Chad would succeed. Chad's parents hoped that he would do well in the career of his choice and have a social life of his own. Chad was given many supports from the moment he was born. His parents made every effort to include him with his peers so he could model their interests and typical behaviors. It was important to Chad's parents that he feel a sense of love and belongingness among family and friends.

Chad has paved the way for many students with moderate disabilities. During his early years, Chad went to school in Raleigh, North Carolina and Fort Thomas, Kentucky. He was specially selected by his school to be the first student with a functional mental disability (FMD) classification in the district to be mainstreamed in middle school. Chad was later enrolled in a regular high school that had previously only included students with milder disabilities. Throughout his school career, Chad and his family felt that he was truly included and was treated as a valued member of his school community. Chad was invited to be the manager of the high school football team. The team won the state championship that year and Chad spontaneously led the team in singing "We Are the Champions" on the bus as it left the stadium. The football players on the team insisted that Chad order a championship ring, too. It is still one of his most treasured possessions.

Chad left high school behind when he graduated in 2004. Right now, Chad is working at a restaurant in Paris, a position he has held for eight years. He works part-time and is responsible for the hospitality, cleanliness, and organization of the restaurant. Chad also supervises another employee, who happens to be a student from his old high school. During his employment at this restaurant, Chad has made connections with the other employees.

He has built a particularly meaningful relationship with one of his co-workers, Joanna.

Chad says, "Joanna is a nice person because she helps me a lot in the lobby. We've been friends for a long time, and she helps me get along with [the student he supervises]." Joanna and Chad regularly take their breaks together.

In addition to his part-time work schedule, Chad participates in activities in the community. Chad is involved regularly in the Special Olympics in bowling and basketball. He is also a member of First Christian Church in Paris. Chad volunteers his time at the church to visit other church members and he assists in delivering food to people who need help with their meals. He is also a member of AIM, or Advocates in Motion. AIM is a social group for adolescents and adults with Down syndrome and is a part of the Down Syndrome Association of Central Kentucky (DSACK).

According to Chad's mother, "Chad has matured into a kind, thoughtful, sensitive, and compassionate young adult. He has a passion for things that interest him and people sense that he cares about what he does and who he is."

This is reflected through all of the activities Chad is a part of as well as all of the people with whom he has made connections. Of course, he is a huge fan of University of Kentucky basketball and football. Chad enjoys reading the newspaper to keep up with the scores from the UK games as well as the latest news, shopping independently for gifts for special occasions, and reading books to his nephew, Elijah. Chad also cares for his golden retriever, Jake.

When asked about the most important people in his life, Chad names his top six: his parents, Jeff and Susan; his sister, Sarah; his nephew, Elijah; his brother-in-law, Matt; and his co-worker, Joanna.

Of his parents, Chad says, “They’re nice, funny, and I’m so lucky that my parents love me very much. My father thinks I’m kind, brave, and smart. I know they’re lucky to have me”.

Chad also has a close bond with his sister, Sarah.

Chad says, “Sarah is a very important sister because if I lost my job, she would help me. She’s taught me everything I know. We’ve been pals since we’ve been kids. I love her and she is so lucky to have me as a brother.”

Chad feels a special connection with his brother-in-law, Matt, and the nephew who was named after him, Elijah Chad. Chad spends a great deal of time taking care of Elijah and values that opportunity.

Chad states, “Eli is a good boy and he’s a fun nephew. He is named after me. I like to read to him before he goes to bed at night, and I like to play hide-and-go-seek and cars with him”.

Chad has big plans for his future. He wants to continue to be active in all of the things he likes to do and with his church, as well as keep his position at the restaurant. He describes his lifelong goal as helping others. Specifically, Chad would like to continue to help families and people at his church. His ultimate goal is to help to provide food to those in need. Chad also has plans similar to any young adult his age: to get married and have a child. He says that if he doesn’t get married, he would like to adopt.

When asked what advice he would give to youth with disabilities in pursuit of their future goals, Chad says, “Love what you do. Help others with their problems. Laugh every day.”

Martha

She's The Boss!

Like all of us, Martha lives a life full of variety. Life is a series of experiences and learning opportunities, especially when you are 22 years old. We all try new things in life, to learn what we like and what we don't. Indeed, Martha's friends and family spend a lot of time experimenting with different activities in order to find what works for Martha. Doing so has resulted in Martha's meaningful participation in school and in her community. Even though Martha does not use spoken words to communicate, the people who know her understand what works and what doesn't work for Martha. Because of purposeful planning and focus on what is important to her, Martha has a valuable role in her community that many only aspire to and few will achieve, a small business owner.



Building a Strong Connection With Animals: At the age of 6, Martha began therapeutic horseback riding. Martha first rode lying down on a gentle horse as she built up enough strength to sit upright and ride. In fact, Martha's small motor movements are typically improved for one or two days after she rides. Riding also gives her improved hand dexterity and was where she first used her hands. She uses this coordination for some of the tasks required of her in her work. Martha has a special relationship with one horse in particular, Chico. Through riding at the Central

Kentucky Riding for Hope, Martha has discovered her love of animals. Today, she rides at every opportunity.

Connecting With Her Community: Martha was very involved in her high school and spent a lot of time with her peers. She went to Prom, Spirit Week, and International Day. In 2007, Martha graduated from Model Laboratory School in Richmond, Kentucky. After graduation, Martha continued learning through classes in Aerobic Walking at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU). She used her gait-trainer, a device used to help individuals walk, in Aerobic Walking. One semester, she also performed with ECU's Dance Theatre in a piece called, PosABILITIES. Martha was enrolled in a Shiatsu Massage class at ECU in which she learned techniques such as Tai Chi. With the help of a lift and an occupational therapist, she was able to perform the signature movements of the Tai Chi method. Martha is an active member in her church. She enjoys spending time at the beautiful arboretum on the campus of the University of Kentucky with her gait trainer, as well as visiting the mall and shopping centers. For recreation, Martha swims.

It's Funny How an Idea Takes Shape: All of Martha's experiences have led to the discovery of one of her greatest passions: baking. This, in turn, became the seed to grow a small business. Martha's mother, Mary, described the process of developing Martha's business as experimental. It all started after a conversation with another student's mother after school one day. Martha was a junior in high school at the time. During the conversation, Mary said that Martha enjoyed cooking and loved to be around animals. The mother of the other student said she had a recipe for peanut butter dog biscuits that she wanted to share with Martha. Mary never quite followed through with the tip, but continued talking about it now and then. About a year later, the mother who gave Mary the suggestion for the biscuits

opened her own store in Old Town Berea selling fudge and candy. She said if Martha could master the peanut butter recipe, she could sell the dog biscuits in the store. Martha and her mother began working intently on the recipe and before long, she had a perfect product.

Shoot for the Moon Animal Treats was launched in September of 2006. With the help of the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and her occupational therapist, Martha's business was soon up and running.

Mary explains, "She likes to cook but we were really worried about the packaging. We went to the occupational therapist and said that we needed some of Martha's therapy to center on her moving dog bones and putting them into the bags because that seemed really hard. What we've found is that Martha likes the packaging almost as much as she likes the baking. I think she sees it as a completion! She likes that the packaging makes her treats look pretty."

Both Martha and her mother recognize the importance of natural supports in making her dream come true. Martha's natural supports come from letting various people know about animal treats; people at church, around the community, and even people who are waiting in the line of cars outside of the school building at the end of the day. One source of ongoing support for Martha has been her occupational therapist, Kristy. Kristy has always had high expectations for Martha and corrected her family if they ever underestimated her. She has always made sure that Martha's therapy related to her life, as in the packaging of the dog biscuits. Kristy was the person who first introduced Martha to baking and the two soon discovered that Martha had a knack for it.

Flexibility is Key: Flexibility is a key to being successful. In a recent presentation on the needs of families with children with

disabilities, Mary spoke about the importance of flexibility and planning for the future.

Mary said, “We’ve agreed to move a small amount of money out of respite, and that scares me a little bit as a mom, but what we’re moving it towards is having somebody who can work with Martha on packaging other than me and her occupational therapist. That’s just part of helping Martha grow up. So that kind of flexibility, that willingness to think about resources becomes a really important piece of flexibility. It’s a part of really making person-centered choices.”

Person-centered choices are an important consideration for Martha and her family.

There are big plans for the future of Martha’s baking business. She has a horse treat that is ready to market and there is development to create a treat especially for cats in the works. Soon, a *Shoot for the Moon Animal Treats* website will follow. Martha has accomplished all of this by varying her experiences early on until she found exactly what it was that made her happy.

Today, Shoot for the Moon Animal Treats sells a peanut butter dog treat (Top of the World Peanut Butter Bones), a parmesan dog treat (Martha’s Cheesy Moons), and will soon launch its first treat for horses (Galactic Equine Treats). For information on ordering, please call (859) 986-9715 or email Martha@chpl.net

Tips for Success

Deciding what to do after high school can be a difficult task for anyone. Now that you have read about some people in Kentucky who have succeeded after high school, find out what you can do to get ready to begin your next chapter. Below are some tips for success when planning for the future.

Start early

It's never too early to start planning for your future. There are many things that you can do while still in high school to get ready for college or a career:

- Work with your parents and teachers to decide what works best for you in the classroom and at your future job.
- Work on your self-advocacy skills (see below).
- Become involved in your Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings as much as you can.
- Look for chances to start volunteering at places that are of interest to you, such as shadowing at a doctor's office or volunteering at an animal shelter.

Ask for help when you need it

As we have learned from the people in this book, speaking up for yourself is a major key to success both in college and in a career. Just as these people became strong self-advocates for themselves, so should you learn to tell others what works and what does not work for you. In particular:

- Know where you struggle and do not be afraid to tell someone if something is not working for you.
- Be sure to use any assistive technology tools (like a computer or iPad) that you may need at school and at work.
- There are people who can help when it comes to choosing a college path, a job, and other choices that you will be making during this part of your life. Talk to your teachers, your counselors, learning coaches, tutors, and people who are already in the kind of job you want to have.
- If you take medicine or have doctor visits, have a plan about how you will manage these while at college or while working.

Keep and build relationships

Having a group of people who support you and the path you want to take in life is important in your success. Many of the people featured in this book needed others for help and support when they got out in the world—and that’s ok! We all need people in our lives to lean on.

- Look for chances to meet people with your similar interests.
- Join school teams and clubs.
- Get involved with service activities at your school.
- Seek out advice and support when you need it.
- Use resources such as school directories and websites to connect with people.

Some Differences between High School and College

High School:

Education is a RIGHT.

Core changes in classes are required, such as the amount of material or learning objectives, if the student needs those modifications.

School district develops Individualized Education Program (IEPs) and must follow this legal document.

Student is helped by parents and teachers, even without asking.

Parent has access to student records.

Students need parental permission to participate in most activities.

High school is free.

College:

Education is NOT a right.
Students must apply to attend.

NO changes are required to what must be learned – only adjustments or accommodations to assist with learning.

Student must identify needs and ask for services.
No IEP exists and the IEP is NOT considered legal documentation for college.

Student must request accommodations from Disability Services Office.

Parent has no access to student records without student's written consent.

Student is an adult and gives own permission

Student must pay for college through financial aid and other arrangements.

*Adapted from ThinkCollege.net

Kentucky Resources

Access to Postsecondary Education

<http://www.shepky.org/> select Resources, then select Access

This PDF resource booklet is a great planning guide for students and families, teachers, and school counselors. It answers many questions about requirements for getting admitted into higher education, as well as what kinds of things students should be considering while still in high school, like what kinds of classes to be taking to get ready for postsecondary education.

Get a Life! Planning for the Transition from High School to Work Life

<http://www.shepky.org/> select Resources, then select GetALife

This booklet is designed for you and is built around the different options available to young adults as they move from high school to life in the community.

Go Higher KY

<http://www.gohigherky.org/>

This resource uses planning tools to give you a head start on your path to college. Begin by clicking either the “high school student” or “adult learner” links.

Human Development Institute Disability Resource Manual

<http://www.hdi.uky.edu/>

Visit the website of the Human Development Institute and select Products and Resources. The Kentucky Disability Resources manual is available as a PDF file and lists easy-to-read

information about available resources. It is also available in Spanish.

Kentucky Community and Technical Colleges

<http://www.kctcs.edu/>

Visit KCTCS online for information on applying. With 16 colleges and 67 campuses across Kentucky, KCTCS brings first-rate education to every corner of the state.

Kentucky Council on Developmental Disabilities

<http://chfs.ky.gov/kcdd>

The Kentucky Council on Developmental Disabilities creates change through visionary leadership and advocacy so that people have choices and control over their own lives. The website includes valuable resources and links related to advocacy and disability in Kentucky.

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

<http://ovr.ky.gov/>

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation assists Kentuckians with disabilities in getting or keeping employment. All Kentucky counties have vocational rehabilitation counselors. The website includes a field directory, consumer handbook, and other employment related information.

Megan's Story: A Study in Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (video)

<http://www.hdi.uky.edu/ProductsAndResources.aspx>

Visit The Human Development Institute's website and select Products and Resources. View a first-hand account of the journey through the transition process of one of the young women featured in this book.

Postsecondary Inclusion Partnership

<http://pip.ihdi.weebly.com/index.html>

The Postsecondary Inclusion Partnership (PIP) is a model project aimed at including students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in postsecondary education. It is funded until June, 2011 through a grant from the Kentucky Council on Developmental Disabilities.

School-to-Work Opportunity Act

http://ada.ky.gov/stw_opp_act.htm

Becoming familiar with the opportunities available to you is important. The School-to-Work Opportunity Act was designed to provide all students with opportunities to participate in programs that integrate school- and work-based learning, vocational and academic education, and secondary and postsecondary education.

Supported Higher Education Project in Kentucky

<http://www.shepky.org>

The Supported Higher Education Project (SHEP) provides information on postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities. SHEP also provides training and assistance to institutions of higher education and providers of adult disability services and supports.

Transition One Stop

<http://www.transitiononestop.org>

This website provides information related to the many transitions we encounter across our life spans. It is a resource for anyone going through a life change, including people with disabilities who may have additional needs during life transitions.

National Resources

Think College

<http://www.thinkcollege.net/>

Doors to colleges are opening for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in many different ways all over the country. This website is designed to share what is currently going on, provide resources and strategies, let you know about training events, and give you ways to talk to others. The information is for transition aged students as well as adults attending or planning for college. It provides resources and tools for students, families, and professionals.

Disability.gov

https://www.disability.gov/education/financial_aid/loans

Disability.gov is an award-winning federal government website that provides an interactive, community-driven information network of disability-related programs, services, laws and benefits. This link provides opportunities for financial aid.

Going to College

<http://www.going-to-college.org/>

Learn how to use your strengths, learning style and interests to set goals for college as well as what to expect in college and what professors will expect from you. Read tips for good grades, accommodations and using technology. Learn what you can do now to prepare for and apply to college.

National Secondary Transition and Technical Assistance Center (NSTAAC) <http://www.nsttac.org/>

NSTTAC is a national Technical Assistance and Dissemination Center funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

Person-Centered Services

<http://www.qualitymall.org/main/>

This is a place where you can find lots of free information about person-centered supports for people with intellectual/developmental disabilities. You can look through each link to learn about positive practices that help people with intellectual/developmental disabilities live, work and participate in the community and improve the quality of their supports.

Preparing Students with Disabilities for School-to-Work Transition (PDF)

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/Transition%20Planning%20WEB.pdf>

Read this document provided by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) for more information about the planning that goes into the school-to-work transition.

Notes:

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