North Dakota Recruits Low-income Youth with Disabilities to Further Their Education and Become More Employable

By Amy Armstrong, Project Director

NDCPD is recruiting 50 North Dakota youth to participate in a six state project to improve their education and employment outcomes. The Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment (ASPIRE) project is recruiting youth with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 16 and their families to participate in the ASPIRE project.

ASPIRE North Dakota is a collaboration of six states: Arizona, Colorado, Montana, North and South Dakota, and Utah. This partnership was formed to implement the U.S. Department of Education grant under the Promoting the Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE) Initiative.

“All children deserve a chance to achieve their educational and career goals,” said Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. “The PROMISE initiative provides services and support to help our most at-risk students and their families so that they can focus on their education and a brighter future.”

The terms of the federal grant randomly divides the teens into two groups. Twenty-five of the fifty North Dakota teens and their families who enter the project will receive information about existing services in North Dakota. The remaining twenty-five youth will be offered additional case management, benefits counseling, financial capability training, career and work-based learning experiences, and parent information and training until September 2018. The two groups, those who were offered the additional services and those who receive existing services, will be compared to determine the effectiveness of the additional services.

To learn more about ASPIRE North Dakota see www.aspirewest.org or contact Amy Armstrong, ASPIRE North Dakota site coordinator at Amy.Armstrong@minotstateu.edu or (800) 233-1737.
Inclusive Communities Means More Than Curb Cuts

By Neil Scharpe

When we think of inclusion most of us relate to a person with a physical disability having access to buildings, sidewalks and things like restrooms. But there is so much more to fully including all people with disabilities.

NDCPD has partnered with Family Voices, The Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health and DLN Consulting, Inc. to assist all North Dakotans in accessing health insurance through the Federal Marketplace which was established by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), also referred to as Obamacare.

In the two years of open enrollment a contingency of Navigators have provided outreach and enrollment services across the state. Over 18,000 people have enrolled in a qualified health plan through the Marketplace and another 20,000 people have accessed Medicaid Expansion.

How is this inclusion you might ask? The ACA eliminated prior existing conditions as a deterrent to accessing health insurance. Navigators have many stories of people who had diabetes, heart conditions and other conditions that made health insurance unaffordable. Today these people can access insurance just like any other person without paying a higher premium.

Accessing health insurance today can be complicated but Navigators are stationed across the state to meet with you to discuss your options. Open enrollment for 2016 begins November 1 but North Dakotans can access Medicaid Expansion anytime during the year. If you know someone who needs health insurance have them call 1-800-233-1737.

Inclusion means more these days thanks to the ACA.

“The ACA eliminated pre-existing conditions as a deterrent to accessing health insurance.”
Living Successfully in Minot State University’s Residence Halls

By JoLynn Webster

For many young people, college plays an important role in their transition to adulthood. Because of NDCPD’s postsecondary education program known as A-STEP (the Adult Student Transition Education Program), the college experience has also been a reality for some students with intellectual disabilities. In addition to attending classes at Minot State University (MSU), some of the A-STEP students also live in the MSU residence halls (with their peers who do not have disabilities) where they have opportunities to learn important independent living, self-determination, and social skills.

In order to ensure that the A-STEP students are adequately supported to live in the residence halls, members of the A-STEP team have worked closely with staff from MSU’s Residence Life Program to provide workforce development activities. Through a variety of trainings provided by A-STEP staff, Resident Assistants (RAs) are equipped to support the A-STEP student in daily living activities and residence hall social events. Ongoing dialog is held with the RAs to address each A-STEP student’s unique needs. Because of this collaboration between MSU’s Residence Life Program and the A-STEP Program, students with intellectual disabilities are transitioning from high school students living at home to college students who are supported to live more independently.

Two young adults who lived in MSU’s residence halls while attending college through A-STEP are Peter and Kayla. Because Peter was attending MSU from a small town near Grand Forks, ND, living in the residence hall was an obvious choice for him. Peter notes that living in the residence hall gave him valuable access to a variety of college experiences and also helped him to gain important social skills for interacting with others. For Peter, the comradery that he experienced as a result of living in the residence halls with other MSU students was one of the highlights of his college experience.

Even though Kayla is from the Minot community, she chose to live in the residence halls because that’s where her mom lived when she was in college and Kayla wanted to have a similar opportunity.
Because Kayla is from a close-knit family, her transition to independent living on campus was somewhat difficult. In spite of the challenges, however, Kayla has learned beneficial time management and daily living skills such as cooking and cleaning. Kayla’s favorite part of living in MSU’s residence halls is the activities planned by the RAs. In Kayla’s own words, “It’s fun!”

Like other MSU students who live in the residence halls, campus life is an integral part of college for students in the A-STEP program. Living on campus enables A-STEP students to establish connections with other students on campus and provides easy access to campus events without having to worry about transportation logistics. Being able to live independently in an MSU residence hall is a significant step toward adulthood for the students who are enrolled in the A-STEP program. The A-STEP program is appreciative of the opportunities that it has had to partner with MSU’s Residence Life Program to provide workforce training. Because of this, students with intellectual disabilities are being successfully supported to live on campus.

“Because of this collaboration between MSU’s Residence Life Program and the A-STEP Program, students with intellectual disabilities are transitioning from high school students living at home to college students who are supported to live more independently.”
The Affordable Care Act: Promoting Self-Determination

By Jolene Orluck

According to the Department of Education, over the past decades great milestones have been achieved to promise hope and future for people with disabilities. However, despite the past achievements, our system still has limitations when offering effective resources for individuals and their families with disabilities. This has left some individuals and their families faced with frustration and despondency with little options for choice of services.

It is apparent that a systemic overhaul is needed. Our system needs to strive for the transformation of becoming not only a more cost-effective system, but also empowering individuals and their families with disabilities to make choices when determining the services they receive. Experts have identified that a key component to achieving this transformation is the promotion of self-determination. However, individuals with disabilities and their families face challenges in practicing self-determination within a society that doesn’t always widely find it permissible or acceptable. All too often society doesn’t understand or refuses to accept that an individual with a disability is capable of making their own choices or exercising self-determination.

Self-determination is the act of empowering individuals and their families to make choices. One choice that should be acquirable for individuals or families with disabilities is the option to select their own healthcare. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) provides individuals and their families with disabilities an option to choose between public or private health insurance. Provisions of the ACA are intended to expand access to insurance, increase consumer protections, emphasize prevention and wellness, and improve quality and system performance. For the individuals and families with disabilities, ACA has provided an avenue to exercise self-determination by prohibiting annual or lifetime monetary caps, non-renewability, and preventing a company sanctioning coverage denial due to a pre-existing condition.

NDCPD promotes the concept of self-determination through its overall mission to provide service, education, and research which empowers communities to welcome, value and support the well-being and quality of life for people of all ages and abilities. NDCPD has been awarded a cooperative agreement from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to assist North Dakotans with accessing healthcare insurance through the Federal Healthcare exchange.
NDCPD has established a statewide collaborative network of regional Navigators and Certified Application Counselors (CAC) from local community organizations to meet the needs of people in that region. NDCPD seeks to provide Navigator support to people who are uninsured or underinsured. One of the specifically targeted groups who are at high risk of being uninsured are people with mild disabilities, people with mental health disorders, farmers, young adults, and Native Americans. Project Director, Neil Scharpe, explains that through the Marketplace exchange residents have options of a variety of healthcare plans. Although the 2015 open enrollment period is now closed, people still have options. The ACA offers special enrollment periods. If qualified, an individual may enroll in health insurance outside annual open enrollment period. A life changing event such as having a baby, adopting a child, getting married, or losing current existing health insurance coverage are considered qualifications for special enrollment. However, you may apply for Medicaid anytime throughout the year.

NDCPD believes that people with disabilities have the right to expect the services they receive will appropriately promote their independence, productivity, integration, and inclusion. The ACA has been surrounded by great political controversy and questioned by financial experts regarding the negative impact this legislation may have on our economy. However, there is one positive outcome we can applaud as the result of the enactment of the ACA. A positive outcome where all individuals have the opportunity to exercise self-determination and allowing individuals and families with disabilities to have options to exercise their right to equally determine and choose their own healthcare like other citizens.

NDCPD has qualified navigators on staff who are trained and certified to answer questions regarding the Health Insurance Marketplace. For further information, please contact NDCPD at 1-800-233-1737. Enrollment assistance is available and free of charge.

“Self-determination is the act of empowering individuals and their families to make choices.”
Increasing access to health care among people with disabilities is one of the main focus areas of the Disability Health II Project. In a 2012 survey of people with disabilities, Disability Health II found that exam tables, weight scales, limited assistance from health care facility staff, limited space to maneuver a wheelchair, and inaccessible informational materials were all top barriers to accessing health care.

Funded by a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Disability Health II staff have conducted several accessibility assessments of health care facilities throughout North Dakota using the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines and recommendations. Staff follows the path of travel that patients would take in the facility - looking at everything from the main entrance, to the patient rooms, to the bathrooms, to the informational materials. Participation in the assessment is voluntary, and the outcome is a report highlighting areas of the facility that are accessible and areas that could use improvement. Because Disability Health II is a non-regulatory body, any improvements made are strictly determined by each facility.

Disability Health II staff followed up with several clinics to see what changes had occurred as a result of the assessment. The following changes have a significant impact on improving accessibility:

• Arrange chairs in the waiting area to provide more space for all individuals, including those who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices, to move about the area.
• Relocate moveable fixtures, such as garbage cans, to different areas to increase access to the bathroom sink.
• Adjust door pressures to reflect ADA guidelines.
• Lower coat hooks to a recommended height in patient rooms.
• Create new signage to include non-glare finish, raised characters and braille.
• Report information to be used in planning for future facilities.
• Request additional accessible parking spaces.
• Increase awareness of accessibility among service providers was indicated.

All of the facilities who participated indicated the assessment was very useful. While not all recommended improvements have been made, many of those improvements are now documented and will be used for future facility planning. Disability Health II continues to promote the availability of accessibility assessments throughout the state.

“All of the facilities who participated indicated the assessment was very useful.”
**What’s Happening?**

**Torches To Travel Nation Ahead Of Special Olympics**
Three torches will make their way across the country in the coming weeks reaching every state on foot or by bicycle before converging at the Special Olympics World Games this summer.

**Pets Reduce Stress In Kids With Autism, Study Finds**
Animals may offer more than comfort for kids with autism, according to new research finding that pets can bring about physiological changes in those with the developmental disorder.

**Technology Breaks Silence For Nonverbal Students**
For years, educators and parents have reported promising results with iPads among kids with special needs. Now, the technology is proving useful for older students with disabilities too.

**Doctors Largely Unprepared To Treat Adults On The Spectrum**
A new survey finds many health care providers admittedly know little about how to care for adults with autism.
Our Mission

To provide leadership and innovation that advances the state-of-the-art and empower people with disabilities to challenge expectations, achieve personal goals and be included in all aspects of community life.

nDcpd’s Quarterly Newsletter

Upcoming Trainings

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<tr>
<td>August 18, 2015</td>
<td>Organizing for Action on Employment First: Strategic Steps &amp; Best Practice for Realizing the Vision of Employment First</td>
<td>Mary Mercer or Amy Armstrong</td>
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Personnel Corner

New NDCPD Hires

Shannon Ritchie
MIDP Early Interventionist

Vonjy Razafinjatovo
CSTP Student Assistant

For more information on any of our project-sponsored trainings, call 1-800-233-1737