

FRIENDSHIP CORNER

(In previous issues of advocate, the Friendship Corner provided information on how to best use your Individual Education Plan (IEP) and your Individual support Plan (ISP) to promote community connections and friendships. In our third and final part of planning processes, Widening the Circle recommends Person Centered Planning (PCP) as one of the best ways to insure that attention is paid to relationships and friendships in the lives of people with disabilities. Many thanks to Kerry Mahoney, Director of Outreach/Education, SUPPORTbrokers/PALS, The Arc of Massachusetts, for providing this example of PCP in action!)

How to Use Person Centered Planning to Promote Community Connections and Friendships



Many of you will recognize this teen-Samantha (Sam) Gibbs of Reading. Sam's photos as a child have been widely used on many of the Arc Affiliate's websites. Today Sam is a beautiful, social, talented and confident teenager who began her freshman year at Reading Memorial High School.

I have had the pleasure to know Sam, her brothers Alec and Douglas and her parents Lisa and Rob Gibbs for 15 years! Watching them all grow and forging their path for Sam's life to be full and rich has been an inspiration!

I was contacted by Sam's parents Lisa and Rob Gibbs last fall to meet with them to explore how person centered planning could help with this transition. Both Sam and her parents wanted to maximize this opportunity to keep her connected in the Reading community. As Sam's SUPPORTbroker I spent time talking with her about her life and goals for the future. Sam's parents were also part of the conversation and shared their vision for Sam and the fears about the challenges that may be ahead for their daughter. They wanted to make sure that Sam's connections with her friends and community activities would continue.

I also connected with Sam's school personnel at Coolidge Middle School and her team liaison at Reading Memorial HS. It was so reassuring that many of the staff had already attended training in person centered planning conducted by The Institute of Community Inclusion. We determined that the Spring would be a good time to hold a meeting after Sam's IEP and 3 year evaluation.

In May we reconnected back and Sam and her family got to work! Sam with the help of her teachers designed an invitation. Her parents Lisa and Rob connected with the middle and high school to help add to Sam's invitation list. Sam's teacher also supported Sam in developing a power point presentation. The presentation *Who Am I?* can be viewed on the Supportbrokers page :

<http://thearcofmass.org/programs/supportbrokers/person-centered-planning/>

Sam was scheduled to tour the high school in early June and the person centered planning meeting was held afterwards. Sam did a fantastic job beginning the meeting by facilitating her team to introduce themselves and talk about their best time spent with her! The room was filled with a combination of family, new and former teachers and therapists, and friends from middle school.

During the meeting members added to Sam's presentation in regards to her strengths, interests and challenges. Members of the group learned how to best support Sam: what teachers can do (Provide constant positive encouragement, provide hands on experiences) and what she needs from friends (fashion and make up tips, peers to go to for challenging situations).

Sam reviewed her dreams and goals which included working with children, attending college, and learning about cosmetics, hair and clothing. In the future Sam would like to open a shop in Reading. On Sam's concern and worry list was navigating the new building, having someone to eat lunch with, spending common time with friends from middle school and access to clubs and activities. Sam has been an active participant in summer drama productions, chorus and swimming. How will she fit it all in?

The teams contributed to Sam's Action Plan

- Learning the class schedule and navigating the building
- Having social time with friends
- Sam having one calendar to schedule activities at school and receiving support to determine which activities to attend

The meeting ended on a positive note with many of her old team members feeling confident in Sam's abilities and a new team of educators, family and friends feeling positive in knowing she will be successful.

For more information on SUPPORTbrokers/PALS and Person Centered Planning, contact:

Kerry Mahoney
Director of Outreach/Education
SUPPORTbrokers/PALS
The Arc of Massachusetts
PO Box 541603
Waltham, MA 02453
781 891-6270 ext 6109
www.thearcofmass.org