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Thriving Future Talks: *From School to Self-Sufficiency: Navigating the Road to Adulthood*

Join us to explore everyday skills that help IEP learners grow toward greater independence. Whether your child is in elementary school or preparing for the 18–22 transition years, you'll learn ways to support confidence, responsibility, and readiness for next steps and adulthood. Open to all Huntley 158 families who have a child with an IEP.

- **Daily Living Skills:** Early skill-building from ages 3 to 22 boosts independence and access to adult services.
- **Small Tasks Matter:** Simple routines like lunch packing and cleaning enhance confidence and independence for children.
- **Sibling Involvement:** Including siblings in learning boosts empathy and family support for independence skills.
- **Explore Adult Services:** Early understanding of service options improves planning and long-term outcomes for families.
- **Skill Requirements:** Key skills like med self-management impact eligibility for adult programs significantly.
- **Resource Access:** Local grants and programs provide essential support and financial relief during transitions for families.

November 12, 2025 Summary

Daily Living Skills

Families must start building daily living skills early to boost independence and access better adult services.

- **Keith Penke** emphasized that lacking basic daily living skills blocks many students from receiving appropriate adult services, even when they are capable of independence.

Examples:

- A high-functioning student unable to self-administer diabetes medication is forced into a more supportive living environment unnecessarily.
- Families often do tasks for their children for convenience, which unintentionally hinders skill development needed for adult independence.

- Starting skill-building from age **3 to 22** helps ensure readiness for adult life when services are needed.
- The goal is to prevent dependency that limits opportunities and quality of life.
- **Lizzy and Linda Lynn** from Rocking Spectrum shared practical ways to encourage independence through small daily tasks and routines
 - Tasks like packing lunch, choosing clothes, and cleaning up after crafts build confidence even if they seem minor.
 - Celebrating small victories, such as hanging up a backpack or brushing teeth independently, reinforces “I can do it” moments.
 - Using picture schedules benefits both verbal and non-verbal kids by creating predictable routines.
 - Modeling tasks and breaking chores into small steps make challenges manageable and foster learning.
- It's crucial to involve siblings as teachers and supporters to build empathy, patience, and family unity around independence skills
 - Siblings can help with routines and social learning, becoming role models and companions.
 - Inclusion of siblings strengthens family bonds and supports long-term care dynamics.
 - Family events and sensory-friendly activities provided by Rocking Spectrum offer inclusive community participation at **no cost** for families

Transition to Adult Services and Program Options

Understanding adult service options early improves long-term outcomes and eases navigation of complex systems.

- **Krista Frickleton**, Admissions Director at Pioneer Center, outlined the broad spectrum of adult programs serving various functional levels, highlighting the importance of early exploration
 - Pioneer Center offers **24-hour SILA (Community Integrated Living Arrangements)**, intermittent residential services, adult day programs, employment supports, and behavioral health services.
 - Renovations include an indoor basketball court and sensory spaces to enhance client experiences and accessibility.
 - Pioneer Center's trainer apartment helps clients practice independent living skills before moving to more independent housing.
 - Krista stressed touring programs regardless of age to understand housing, employment, and day program options, improving future planning and eligibility preparation.
- The difference between SILA and trainer apartments clarifies levels of support adults may need, with SILA involving staff visits and trainer apartments providing supervised practice for independent living skills
 - SILA requires clients to be mostly independent, including self-administration of medication.
 - Trainer apartments provide a bridge for those needing to build soft skills before full independence.

- Guardianship and self-determination present a complex challenge; clients 18+ who are their own guardians must communicate directly with providers
 - Legal guardianship allows parents to speak on behalf of their adult children, but many higher-functioning adults cannot obtain it.
 - Power of attorney or other supports may be needed to assist families.
 - Krista emphasized the importance of developing communication and self-advocacy skills in clients for accessing services and employment.

Skill Requirements and Barriers for Independence

Certain skills, especially medical self-care, directly affect service eligibility and independence potential.

- Self-administering medication, especially for conditions like diabetes, is a critical skill for many adult programs and housing options
 - Pioneer Center requires med independence for intermittent and 24-hour SILA residents since nursing staff cannot provide round-the-clock medication administration outside the facility.
 - Lack of med independence often restricts clients to higher-support settings, limiting their autonomy.
 - Krista highlighted diabetes management (for example) as a key skill that families should prioritize teaching early to avoid service barriers.
- Even clients with high work skills can be blocked from independent living if they lack basic life skills like making phone calls or managing appointments
 - Employment services support job coaching initially but expect clients to take over tasks like scheduling interviews independently.
 - Families should gradually involve children in higher-level tasks to build confidence and readiness.
- **Keith** and Krista both stressed the value of productive struggle in developing independence, cautioning against over-supporting children in school or home settings
 - Over-assistance may create dependency that hinders post-secondary success, such as college readiness or independent work.
 - Parents and school teams should evaluate if supports help build skills or foster reliance, balancing immediate needs with long-term goals.

Collaboration Between Families and Schools

Consistent communication and aligned goals between families and school teams improve skill development outcomes.

- Keith Panke emphasized that home and school struggles differ and partnering with the school team is vital to synchronize skill-building efforts
 - School environment influences student behavior differently than home, requiring tailored strategies in both settings.
 - Families should share home challenges so school goals can adjust accordingly for better progress.

- Regular communication ensures that supports address both current needs and future independence goals.
- Aligning IEP goals with the child's aspirations is critical for motivation and effectiveness
 - Young adults often resist parental instruction but respond to goals tied to their desires, like living independently or gaining employment.
 - Focusing on "why" a skill matters helps engage students in learning necessary abilities.

Resource Access, Funding, and Community Support

Local programs and funding streams provide critical assistance during transition periods and ongoing support.

- Pioneer Center accepts Medicaid waivers and encourages families to start the **PUNS (Prioritization for Urgency of Need for Services)** process early to secure services by age 22
 - Early enrollment in PUNS helps align IEPs and adult service planning to ensure smooth transition.
 - Krista offered one-on-one consultations to personalize service navigation and skill-building strategies.
- McHenry County received a grant to cover day programming costs for families waiting on Medicaid eligibility, reducing financial barriers during transitions
 - This funding provides temporary relief and access to programs, encouraging families to start service processes early.
- Rocking Spectrum and Pioneer Center offer family events, respite care, and community engagement activities with scholarships or no cost to families, promoting inclusion and support networks
 - Monthly family swims, holiday events, and safety programs strengthen community bonds and provide practical support.
 - Thriving Future Parent Support group launching on December 17th aims to build ongoing peer networks for sharing resources and experiences
- Additional resources like Easter Seals and Services Inc. were shared to broaden family access to services and information

Strategic Recommendations and Next Steps

Families are encouraged to proactively engage in skill-building, service exploration, and advocacy for long-term independence.

- Families should begin teaching daily living skills early and integrate small tasks into routines to foster self-confidence and competence from a young age
 - Even simple choices like clothing selection or packing a backpack have significant developmental impact.

- Consistency, celebration of small wins, and patience are essential to progress.
- Parents of higher-functioning children should gradually involve them in complex tasks like phone calls and appointment scheduling to prepare for adulthood
 - Building these soft skills reduces dependence and improves service eligibility.
- Scheduling tours and consultations with adult service providers like Pioneer Center and Rocking Spectrum is recommended regardless of child's current age or skill level
 - Early knowledge helps families plan and set realistic goals.
 - Providers advise shopping around programs to find best fit.
- Families must understand guardianship options and legal rights to enable appropriate advocacy and communication as children reach adulthood
- ***Guardianship is the topic for the January 14th Thriving Future Talks!***
 - Upcoming sessions on guardianship will deepen family understanding and planning.
- Parents are urged to collaborate with school IEP teams to balance immediate supports with long-term independence goals and avoid creating unnecessary dependence
 - Productive struggle is vital for skill acquisition and future success.
- Contacting presenters Keith Penke, Ina Hall, Lizzy and Linda Lynn, or Krista Frickleton for personalized support and information is encouraged to tailor strategies and services.