

Transition Services for Young Adults who are Blind with Multiple Handicaps

Chen Min

Vice Director

Shanghai School for the Blind

1850 Hongqiao Road,

Shanghai

China

86-21-62429569 (Office Number)

86-13801774382 (Cell Phone Number)

chenmin4382@126.com

As children who are visually impaired with multiple handicaps grow up to become young adults, some of them will leave school to live in their community. The completion of school is the beginning of adult life. Young people and their families are faced with many options and decisions about the future. As teachers we need to think about how to prepare them to live, work and participate in the community as independently as possible. Currently, at Shanghai School for the Blind we are faced with many challenges, such as how to make full use of family and community supports; how to increase our campus resources by creating work opportunities to improve our student's vocational experiences; and how to teach students make positive relationships with male and/or female friends. If the purpose of education is to prepare for life, we really need to develop a functional curriculum to prepare students to live as independently as possible in the community and to build a service system to support the young adults' future life.

The aim of transition services for young adults who are visually impaired with multiple handicaps is to develop a functional curriculum and set up a support service system based on the person centered planning. In this way we will promote young people to make the smoothest transition possible. We have provided a variety of services for

students who reaches 14 years of age or older. They have received instructions in activities of daily living skills, social skills and career exploration and employment skills .All this will help them as they transfer to community from school when they leave. We do try our best to help them make the smoothest transition possible and enhance their quality of life as young adults with disabilities.

Developing the Individualized Transition Planning

Transition services are intended to prepare students to make the transition from the world of school to the world of adulthood. Transition Planning focuses on the future and identifies which outcome goals are important for individual students based on their unique abilities and interests.

The purpose of an Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs) is to clarify a student's life/career goals, anticipate the future needs of the students, and identify available resources to meet those needs. We need to consider areas such as vocational training, employment, independent living, and community participation. In planning what type of transition services a student needs to prepare for adulthood, a support team made up of family members and professionals who know the person with a disability outlines the individual's background, current activities, and desired outcome goals. We invite the following people to be involved in the transition planning as a work team:

- student
- family member(s)
- teacher and staff who work for the student
- administrator
- community service representative (district disabled agency)
- private agencies (e.g., parents who work in the private agency)
- family's neighbor or people who live around the student in the community

We provided the training for people who will be invited to attend the transition planning meeting to help them make sense of how to figure out the student's interests, preferences, likes and strengths, and successes before the normal meeting. Each of them should know their own roles and take responsibilities for the transition planning meeting. We draw a Plan of Action for transition from school to adult life in the community according to transition planning meeting. Write down a detailed description of goals for the student's future in the action plan and merge it with his/her IEP in order to meet the needs and goals.

Our experiences has shown that it is very important to cooperate with adult agencies such as District Disable Association, Community Committee, and Senior Citizen School to help parents and support their child to live as independently as possible in the community, and make his/ her life is meaningful. In the future we will be continuing to make every effort to contact them to build a support system for the range of student needs.

Developing the Functional Curriculum

The Functional curriculum is designed to provide flexible programming to meet individual student needs. Every student is given the opportunity to continue developing and improving their skills. The emphasis for older students shifts to vocational education and other activities more directly related to living as adults. Actual use of learned skills becomes a greater and greater focus for older students. They are taught to use a variety of skills in real-life, functional environments.

Educational planning is guided by several important factors:

- Individual students' interests, desires, and life experiences are strongly considered in lesson and activity planning.
- Realistic and thoughtful consideration of future options and outcomes guides individual student goal planning. Teachers and students work to make realistic assessments of a student's living and working options for adulthood, and students are prepared to be successful in future environments. Skills to live as independently as possible are taught, while any supports needed for semi-independent living are pursued. Students are encouraged to choose rewarding adult work, whether volunteer or paid, that they can enjoy and do successfully. Needed supports for adult work are also identified and planned.
- Quality of life for students, both at present and in the future, is a major consideration. We work to help students build a realistic self- esteem, based on clear knowledge of themselves as individuals. Students need to be encouraged to seek out rewarding social interactions and to learn the communication and interpersonal skills needed to do so successfully. Students are taught about their world so that they will have the basis for developing personal interests and hobbies, and so they can have interesting conversations with others. Students are taught skills and resources to seek out information on their own, so they can do so more independently after they leave the school environment.

Students will reach the following outcomes:

- Use knowledge of their personal goals, strengths, limitations, and preferences with confidence to make relevant and realistic life choices.
- Use appropriate technology to develop basic reading, writing, and math skills to the extent that they are able to do so in the context of an overall learning program.
- Utilize functional reading, writing, math, and technology to enhance their performance of daily activities.
- Work constructively and productively in the community.
- Develop the domestic skills that will enable them to live independently with others in the community.
- Gain cultural knowledge and use this knowledge to develop personal interests and hobbies and to share these interests with others.
- Utilize recreation and leisure skills to enhance their enjoyment of free time.
- Use social and communication skills to build relationships with a variety of other people in the context of daily activities.
- Make informed choices that lead to a healthy lifestyle.
- Utilize knowledge of human relationships and sexuality to make appropriate decisions about their personal lives.
- Be good problem solvers and competent decision makers.

Functional curriculums can be described as having three modules:

- **Independent Living Skills**
The focus of independent living skills is to help students learn the practical skills necessary for living as independently as possible after leaving school. It includes some areas such as functional reading and writing, functional math (budgeting personal funds), orientation & mobility, self-care/household duties, etc.
- **Community Living Skills**
Understanding the social moral code and basic etiquette that adults should observe. Mastering the skills with solving problem, self-advocacy and leisure and recreation to improve the adaptation of social environment and integrate with society. It includes communication, behavior management, social & sex education and leisure and recreation, etc.

- Vocational Skills

Work is the fundamental activity of adult life, and also reflects a part of society values. The vocational skills program is an essential component of an educational curriculum for successful transition to community. A vocational curriculum should be designed specifically to meet students' individual needs, abilities and interests, and think of the family perspectives and workable opportunities to them from collaborating with community. It is important to consider how to foster the students the work attitude and occupation morality, learn how to cooperate with others and protect themselves during the work when we work on this area.

Table 1 Provide the differentiated curriculum to address the student's needs. This table illustrates one way in which may be grouped.

Curriculum Module	Subjects		Activities	
	Obligatory Course	Elective Course	Comprehensive Activity	Social Practice
Independent Living Skills	Functional Chinese	Technology	Theme-based	
	Functional Math			
	O & M			
	P.E			
	self-care/household duties			
Social Adaptation Skills	Physiological Hygiene		Music	
	Psychology Guidance		Art	
	Social & Sex Education			
	Adolescence and Health			

Vocational Skills		Massage		Each students takes one job in the classroom
		Gardening		Sale of goods for charity
		Student Store		Provide services in the community
		Handicraft Making		
		School Cleaning		
		Waster Recycler		
		Braille Book Binder		
		Postal Deliver		
		Dining Room Cleaner		
		Lunch Deliver		
		Selling the news paper		

Living independently poses many challenges for students who are visually impaired with multi-handicaps, as well as for the teachers who have the responsibility for preparing them. One of the main challenges for the teachers is to find ways to make the curriculum as efficient and effective as possible. It is also a challenge for students and teachers together to find ways to identify those skills that are important to learn and then fit the curriculum into the student's educational program.

One highly effective teaching strategy is to teach skills within the real context that they will be used. In this way, students are taught basic skills that can be used across many activities. When we merge independent living skills with a functional curriculum, students more easily acquire comprehensive skills to use through their lives.

A vocational skills program is an essential component of an educational curriculum for students with visual and multiple disabilities. A strong vocational skills curriculum is one that has been designed specifically to meet a student's individual needs, abilities and interests.

To optimize skill and concept development, it is important for tasks to be meaningful and tied to real opportunities in their environment. Incorporate activities are familiar and commonly found around the home and school. At Shanghai School for the Blind, we created the vocational activities in the real workshops, both on and off campus.

Each student can choose different curriculums based on the different levels of impairments and capabilities, interests and future planning for preparing his/her future life in the adult's community. We ensure that the activities involve practical skills that the student encounters in everyday life and will probably encounter in the work setting.

Setting Up the Support System

Preparing for the student's future life needs to be done with a group of people. We should involve family member, teachers and others who might be from outside of school to work together to help students to make the smoothest transition possible. This support system is known as a circle of support. School, family and community come together to think about what is a desirable future for a student with multiple disabilities requires imagining how and where the individual will live, how he or she will occupy their time and what kind of social network will be available to the individual as an adult.

Working with the family.

The student's family is under a great burden at transition time. In many cases, a lone family member shoulders the task of getting supports in place after the student leaves school. Parents and family members should be vital components of transition planning for their child who has multiple disabilities to ensure their involvement in and subsequent satisfaction with transition planning activities. It is important to build positive working relationships between families and teachers. The following is what we try to do:

- Promote parents involvement in transition planning. We interview with family members to think of what parent's worries are about their child's life in the future and plan for their child. We share suggestions with parents when beginning the transition process and preparing to participate in transition planning meeting.
- Invited parents come to classroom to work with teachers and students together if the parents want to know more about their child. By now, parents are willing to work with teachers and other children not only their child as a volunteer.
- Set "Open School Day" for parents to observe the child to directly get information about what they like what and how he/she does in each learning area. Arrange time to let the parents meet with teachers who work with the child.
- Provided information and consultation to parents. Help parents better understand their children and how to work with them in a positive way. This can be developed through the home visits, training workshops, consultative meeting, and parents-children activities. Parents also get chance to talk together, they very much enjoy sharing the information and ideas with each other, and get support from others.

Working with community.

A healthy transition process is by definition a collaboration process. The successful transition of young adults with multiple disabilities from the school setting to adult opportunities involves the provision of child centered best practices from a diverse array of agencies and organizations. It is important to be familiar with the different support options for people with disabilities which are available in the student's community. The following is what we try to do:

- Invite people who work in the district department of education and district disable associations, and others who work with our students from outsides of school to meet together. We explain the program and to discuss how to keep the program keep going on to make our students strong for their future. We also ask them to continue their support for our program to continue to help students.
- Built relationship with people who offer the support to us such as leader who are in charge of Senior Citizen School, massagist who work in Massage Parlor, people who are in some area in which students learn work skill. The Shanghai School for the Blind actively solicited a variety of employers in our area for participation in our program. They are from both on and off campus.

- Involved volunteer in the program to find the workable resources for the vocational training on campus or in community to support student study, as well as get work experiences

We have tried our best to provide our services to improve the educational quality for children who are visually impaired with multiple handicaps. As each student's skills and levels in the every area are getting stronger and are developing, they are feeling more confident about their future life. Some of them have job in the community and some of them can help themselves at home. Their life is becoming more meaningful. Most of parents we have worked with have been brave to face the challenges and as a result, family-school-community cooperation is growing very well. It is also beneficial to teachers. We get training and improve our teaching skills to make our work more relevant and rewarding.

The Shanghai School knows that there are so many challenges we need to work on as we provide transition services for young adults who visually impaired with multiple handicaps. We are committed to developing those services to pursue our goals to help them to make their life happy, healthy, successful and meaningful. For these reasons, we believe our children have brighter future as a result of the coordinated efforts with parents, professionals and community resources.

Reference:

Transition Services for Youths Who Are Deaf-Blind: "A Best Practices Strategies" Guide for Educators

Iane M. Everson, Editor, The Helen Keller National Center- Technical Assistance Center

Integrating Transition Planning Into the IEP Process

Lynda L. West Division on Career Development

Supporting Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind in Their Communities

Jane M. Everson, The Helen Keller National Center- Technical Assistance Center

Educating Students Who Have Visual Impairments with Other Disabilities

Sharon Z. Sacks, Rosanne K. Silberman, Hunter College City University of New York

Basic Skills for Community Living, A Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments and Multiple Disabilities

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Independent Living, A Curriculum with Adaptations for Students with Visual Impairments
Robin Loumiet, Nancy Levack, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Functional Curriculum

Mary C. Zatta, Martha M. Majors, Perkins School for the Blind