Relationships for Sons and Daughters with Disabilities

By Max Barrows

Having a relationship is really about true inclusion. What do we mean by true inclusion? The first things that come to mind are working in the community or taking typical classes in school. Our definition of true inclusion goes beyond that. When fully included, your son or daughter will have relationships with other people. There are different types of relationships. For example, having friends is essential because your child needs someone else to talk to, and do fun things with. You want your child to be liked for who they really are! This is also a great way to learn the basics about having a healthy relationship. Beyond friendships, there are many other kinds of relationships. Examples might include having a boyfriend/girlfriend/partner, getting married, and having a family of your own.

This may make you feel a little bit nervous. It is a common feeling that almost all parents have, so it is totally understandable. Looking ahead, you need to prepare yourself for your child growing up. Over time, parents get older and eventually may not be able to take care of their children who are now persons with disabilities. It is important to discover what independence is to them, which can mean lots of opportunities to look into. For example, one person with a disability may like to move out of their parent’s house into a shared living situation. Another person may desire living on their own. Others may have goals of living with housemates, a partner or a spouse. Your son or daughter may have no problem living at home, but still wants a “significant other” in their life. What really is important is self-determination among persons with disabilities!
### What Are Common Myths About People with Disabilities and Sexuality?

**By Katherine McLaughlin**

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<table>
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<th>MYTHS</th>
<th>FACTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Myth #1: My son is not interested in sex, he is asexual.</td>
<td>All people are sexual beings. We all need love and intimacy. Having sexual feelings is a typical part of growth and development.</td>
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<td>Myth #2: My daughter may not be able to control her sexual urges.</td>
<td>Provided support and education, people with disabilities can make good decisions about sexuality and lead sexually healthy lives.</td>
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<td>Myth #3: My son will always be just like a child.</td>
<td>Your son or daughter will grow into an adult. This means a person’s needs and wants may change. Prepare for that. Acknowledge sexuality and support learning to participate equally.</td>
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<td>Myth #4: If I talk about sex it may encourage my son to try out undesirable, inappropriate behavior.</td>
<td>There is NO evidence that teaching information about sexuality promotes inappropriate acts. People with better understanding will be more responsible, less confused, and less easily exploited.</td>
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<td>Myth #5: My daughter will never have relationships, so knowing about sexuality and reproduction will make her feel more frustrated and left out.</td>
<td>While it is true that many people with disabilities may have limited opportunities for relationships, they are not unaware of references to social and sexual acts on TV, the internet, magazine, movies, jokes, advertising, and ordinary conversation. Sexuality is a prominent feature in the culture we all live in.</td>
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Making A Presentation: Are You Up To The Challenge?

By Maisie Lajeunesse

Talking in public can be extremely scary but very rewarding. Imagine standing in front of a group of people, your palms sweating, the thoughts racing through your head, and feeling excited to be allowed to share your thoughts with others. It is such a powerful experience that can make you feel so proud and accomplished. There are things you can do to prepare for a public presentation, and reasons to do one.

The most important thing a person can do in their life is to make informed opinions, learn crucial lessons and share both of them with others. To a person with a disability, this concept may seem impossible because of the stigma of not being capable or intelligent. When I started using facilitated communication, my biggest reward was hearing my teacher’s say, “Wow, Maisie, that was a great report”! The feeling of pride made me want to work harder and harder on my school work and communication skills. Everyone is different and has varying abilities, the importance is that they function optimally. To get that, people need knowledge of, and exposure to, typical and not-so-typical practices. People need to advocate for themselves so that they get the opportunity to try different supports. All people with disabilities have the right to advocate for themselves. If they can’t communicate their thoughts, their caregivers have the responsibility to ensure their rights are met. That is why I want to do presentations to show others there is a way to communicate thoughts and desires to maximize their functional ability in their community. By exploring all options, people who have disabilities can be successful socially, academically and be a vital member of the community.

Presentations are much easier to do if you form an outline of what you want to discuss. I put my thoughts into paragraphs on my computer or communication device. I am learning to type independently, and hope one day to be able to answer questions quickly and all by myself. It makes a lot of sense to practice in front of an audience to get the jitters out of your system. Remember that everyone has been nervous before and that is normal.

The thrill of success is my greatest motivator when I contemplate doing a presentation. I hope that you too can feel sweaty palms and pride by advocating for yourself and letting people know you are a valuable member of society.
Eager To Work!
By Cristy Golec

Where do you work?
I work at Sunoco.

How did you find your job?
I walked in looking for an application and I was supported by the employment coordinator.

How many jobs do you have?
I have one job.

Do you work independently?
I am a half an hour independently and working on increasing.

Why did you choose this job?
I thought it was a great place to work at. I get along with other workers.

Do you like your job?
Yes I like my job. I like working with my co-worker.

How long have you been working?
I have been working with Sunoco for 13 months.

What do you enjoy most about your job?
I like to joke around with other co-workers.

What are some things you would like to change about your job?
I would like to expand my duties to include; keeping track of dates on products and on pulling the expired ones.

What would be you dream job?
My dream job is to be working on vehicles. I like to work on other vehicles and I know how to fix them.

What type of skills do you need for this job?
I needed: customer services, reading skills, invoice, how to use the chemicals safely.

If you could have any type of employment what would it be?
I would like to working with animals being a “vet”.

What type of skills did you learn for your job?
Invoice, if something is out of date take and write it on the throw out sheet.

How many jobs have you had?
I have had 4 jobs: Shaw’s, McDonalds, the Odd Fellow Home and Sunoco.

What do you think is a good employee?
I think a good employee is to concentrate on one thing at a time, always on time to work, has a great attitude.

Have your hours been cut?
My hours did not get cut. I work 8 hours per week.
Max Barrows At The White House!

Last year, I went to an Autism Awareness event in the West Wing of the White House. The event was for people to come and speak on behalf of persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The focus was to gather information on how to better look at this developmental disability and speak up about how to better recognize Autism on a positive level. I spoke up about the change that needs to happen among attitudes toward Autism. A lot of the attendees are strong believers of true inclusion. The event went very well and it was a great opportunity to be a guest of the White House. The information that was presented will help me to look at Autism not as a medical issue needing a cure. Persons with Autism should not be viewed as needing to be fixed. Society’s attitude about including people with Autism needs to be repaired. I came back to Vermont excited to continue working on these issues!

HATS OFF to the VT Developmental Disabilities Council

A heart-felt thank you from GMSA to the Council for funding this newsletter and our organization overall!
Living with Autism in the Classroom

By Kris Medina

Living with autism in the classroom is talking about a place of sensory overload. In the classroom there are quite a lot of overwhelming sounds. Put yourself in a time machine and travel to a place where you are the only person, and the place is filled up with loudly talking, playful, particles of time. It wasn’t always easy paying attention while talking to people, their voices were quite painfully loud. To a person with autism, it’s like people racing through tall, quick tapping, quite loud talking tornados. It was tough at times to walk around people or objects through the quick world. People without autism can tolerate quite a lot of stimuli, and people with autism try their hardest to navigate places in which they can function. In the classroom I put energy into everything I worked on. Everything was difficult to accomplish. People supported me with my work, but sometimes I became angry because my mind worked and my body did not.

I have typed since third grade. Many people did not think it was me speaking. I have learned over the years to ignore and persevere. I spent years in the classroom with people that talked with their voice to communicate while I sat alone and typed one paragraph at a time. Typing and communicating are something of the same. Without typing, people would not know my
intelligence. I would work alone on things too easy for my intellect.

In high school I was alone a lot of the time. It was too difficult for me to be with all of the other like-minded kids. I was put in a room, so that I could concentrate. Putting people in quiet places allows them to think and allows them to work, quite then we are typing our way to success. Typing saved me from a lot of lonely days. I was placed in an isolated area, a lot of my conversations were with staff. I tried so hard taking people's cues for social acceptance, but people were sometimes cruel to me. Putting up with people was working on anxiety and quite a lot of frustration. I had to quickly ignore and gain composure. I typed to release pressure from the greatly anxious talking me. The autism in me would not allow a social life outside of planned peer interactions. I wasn't able to talk about the things that were important to me. People chose our conversations, it was very disheartening.

In the classroom I was putting presentations on and getting really good grades. I tried every day to have a positive attitude, I wanted to put everything into my schoolwork. I worked on typing my words so that all people would pay close attention and pay respect to my powerful being. I am a man possessing many wonderful qualities. I am proud of all of the things that I've accomplished. I worked every day on regulation and worked on all aspects of school. Politically I lack intelligence, quite the opposite is true. Please accept people for who they are and do not judge. Everyone is unique and beautiful. When speaking about autism in the classroom remember all students learn differently.
Green Mountain Self-Advocates took the lead in introducing and getting the Respectful Language Bill passed by the Vermont Legislature. Last summer, together with allies we worked as part of a Legislative study group to identify what needed to be changed. This work resulted in recommended wording changes in 29 out of the 33 Vermont statutes. In May 2012 a resolution was passed to move forward on changing our laws to use respectful language describing people with disabilities.