

2007 Tools For Life

Summary

Self-confidence permeated the hallways, packed breakout session rooms, ballroom, and evening social as high school and young adult self-advocates from around the state participated in the Third Annual Tools for Life: Secondary Transition and Technology Fair on March 5 and 6, 2007, at the Doubletree Riverside Hotel in Boise. Tools for Life is the annual showcase for the many individual and group efforts and activities occurring around the state to collaborate, inspire, and educate students, educators, families and agencies about the issues surrounding secondary transition. Conference coordinators and presenters have witnessed the blossoming and self-determination of the young adults with disabilities who have participated in these efforts over the last few years.

Evidence of the increased self-determination was demonstrated by the number of self-advocates participating as presenters and panelists in the conference and self-advocate interns providing conference support and entertainment. These confident young adults mentor and demonstrate to high school students that with self-determination, support, awareness of resources and tools, their post-high schools dreams are possible. Self-advocates accounted for nine of the 50 breakout sessions on post-secondary education, community living, assistive technology, self-advocacy and self-determination. In addition, five self-advocates participated as panelists during the first day luncheon to talk to the group at large about their experiences with transition. Finally, the lively music and entertainment for the evening social and dance was provided by self-advocates as well. Mark Reinhardt, a student at Boise State University, member of the Idaho Interagency Council on Secondary Transition, and self-advocate, also single-handedly arranged for and successfully got media coverage of the conference from Fox News and the *BSU Arbiter*.

Inspiration was in big supply with conference keynote speakers Brett Eastburn, a national motivational speaker born with no arms or legs, Edie Bush, an Idahoan who overcame incredible obstacles battling a disease that left her with no arms and legs, Betsy Valnes, Director of the National Youth Leadership Network, and Tom Luna, our new Idaho State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Through humor, testimony, guidance, information, and thoughtful question and answer periods, keynote speakers helped make the Third Annual Tools for Life conference a success.

Conference success this year was also measured by the willingness of conference attendees to support the event financially. In order to keep attendee numbers to a manageable size and to help support the costs of the event, registration fees were

raised from \$10.00 to \$50.00. Generous donations to help cover the costs of student participation in addition to the willingness of schools, agencies, and individuals to pay the increased registration, enabled conference coordinators to make the event more sustainable and to provide a quality event to the 454 attendees.

Consumer satisfaction, another measure of conference success, was high. Each year, conference evaluations are carefully scrutinized for overall satisfaction with the event and suggestions are taken seriously. There have been many requests over the years to move this event to other parts of the state so that all Idaho high school students with disabilities can benefit from this superb event. Beginning in 2008, the Tools for Life: Secondary Transition and Technology Fair will debut in Idaho Falls. Continuing efforts will be made to bring students in from outlying areas, educating high schools on the importance of the event for their students with disabilities and the many educators, related service providers, and paraprofessionals that support them.

Introduction

Tools for Life is the product of the collaboration of the Idaho Interagency Council on Secondary Transition with representatives from education, state and federal agencies, parents, and self-advocates, all working toward increased opportunities for transitioning students with disabilities in higher education, employment, community living and recreation. Partners of the Tools for Life conference include the Idaho Department of Education, Idaho Assistive Technology Project at the University of Idaho's Center on Disabilities and Human Development, and the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities. In addition, donations to help bring students from rural parts of the state were provided by Key Bank, Stepping Stones of Latah County, Farmers and Merchants Bank, Ada County Realtors, and Tri-State Outfitters.

Partners in the Tools for Life conference are concerned with the outcomes for students with disabilities. Many supports and activities are occurring around the state to benefit transitioning students including transition workshops, assistive technology assessments and training, disability support services at all higher education facilities, job shadowing, job sharing, resource mapping, IEP monitoring, mentoring teachers, mentoring students, etc. The Tools for Life: Secondary Transition and Technology Fair is the annual gathering of students, educators, families, and agencies to educate, network, collaborate, mentor, and showcase these activities aimed at increasing the opportunities of students with disabilities in community life, continued education, and employment.

Attendees

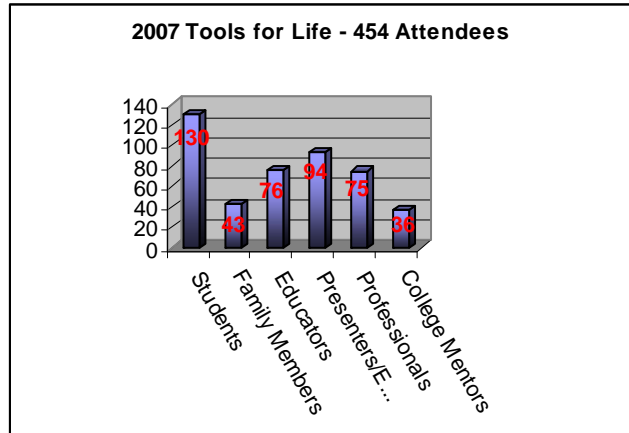
In order to increase sustainability, attendees were asked to help support Tools for Life this year. Registration fees were increased from \$10.00 to \$50.00. A new partner, the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities, contributed \$10,000.00 to help offset the increased registration for students and families that wished to attend. In addition, Irene Lunsford from the Idaho Assistive Technology Project applied for and received

Students	130
Family Members	43
Educators	76
Presenters/Exhibitors	94
Professional	75
Collage Mentors	36
Total	454

approximately \$10,000.00 in grants from Key Bank of Idaho, Farmers and Merchants Bank, Stepping Stones of Latah County, Ada County Realtors, and Tri-State Outfitters that also went towards bringing

students to the event and one self-advocate presenter.

A breakdown of the 2007 Tools for Life attendees is as follows:



Keynote Speakers

Brett Eastburn, a national motivational speaker, opened the Third Annual Tools for Life conference with humor, agility, and as a powerful example of self-advocacy. Born with no arms and legs, Brett prides himself on having “no handicaps.” Brett is an accomplished athlete, artist, comedian, and national speaker. Brett kept the audience laughing and in awe, proving that a spiraled pass of a football is not “all in the wrist,” and that anyone can reach their goals. Brett continued his message with a breakout session and was available throughout the conference for informal discussions.



Betsy Valnes, Director of the National Youth Leadership Network, led the luncheon panel discussion where self-advocates conveyed their stories of successful transitions from high school to college, employment, community life, and motherhood. Betsy also hosted a breakout session on ways to empower young people to excel in inclusive community involvement and activities.

Edie Bush, an Idaho native, captivated the assembly with the tale of her struggle with disease and recovery. After 32 days in a coma, Edie woke to find all of her limbs had been amputated. Edie’s inspiring rehabilitation was possible through her strong faith, family support, and hard work.

Tom Luna, the newly elected Idaho State Superintendent of Public Instruction, addressed the audience at lunch on day two of the conference,



outlining his priorities for education in Idaho. Mr. Luna then opened the floor up for questions and answers following his speech and students, educators, and parents asked thoughtful and stimulating questions. Mr. Luna was attentive to the issues brought forth by the audience, answered those questions that he could speak to, and promised to look into the issues he was not aware of.

Self-Advocates

Self-advocates played an integral part of the Third Annual Tools for Life conference. Self-confident, outspoken, hard-working young adults participated as conference presenters, panelists and paid interns. Presenters and panelists shared their strategies for successful transition from high school and helped with conference duties such as breakout session room monitors and mentors.

After a full first day of conference activities, the evening entertainment was provided by The Country Boys, Chase Doty and Bryden Dimmick, self-advocates as well, with an energetic mix of country and pop music and fun-for-all karaoke.

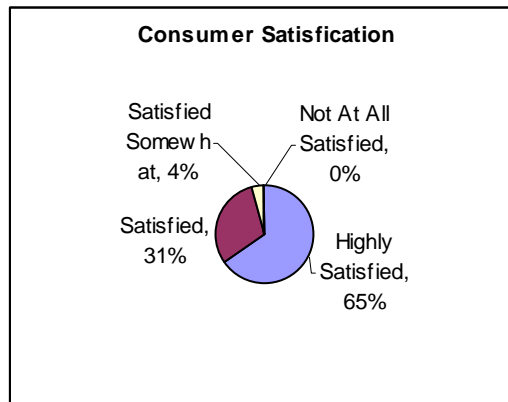
Self-advocate interns received compensation for their hard work from DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) at the University of Washington.



Consumer Satisfaction

Consumer satisfaction was sought by asking each attendee to fill out a conference evaluation. 141 attendees filled out conference evaluations, representing 31% of the total number of those in attendance. Overall satisfaction was high with 65% of respondents “highly satisfied,” 31% “satisfied,” and 4% “satisfied somewhat, and 0% “not at all satisfied.”

Evaluation respondents made many helpful comments to assist with future conference planning. Many educators asked for sessions on secondary IEP development, Special Olympics, and the wish to move the conference to other parts of the state. Parents asked for parent presenters that have helped their children through a successful transition, options for supported living, vocational and technical school representation, and successful models of job



coaching/employment with supports. Students asked for interpreters in more sessions, more relationship sessions, and better food. All suggestions are taken into consideration in planning future conferences.

Budget

The total cost of this year's conference is \$60,205.00 plus in-kind support from the Idaho Assistive Technology Project (IATP). A budget breakdown is attached. Ongoing funding from the State Department of Education and the IATP make this conference possible. Generous additional funding from the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities and fund raising efforts by Irene Lunsford at the IATP resulted in increased financial support available to students. Registration fees were provided for 173 high school and college students with disabilities, adults with disabilities, and parents. 32 students from various parts of the state were provided lodging at the conference and for some was the first time to stay at a hotel. \$10,305.00 was generated by registrations paid directly by schools, individuals, agencies, and exhibitor fees.

Conclusion

The outstanding attendance of The Tools for Life: Secondary Transition and Technology Fair once again demonstrates the need for information on secondary transition, self-advocacy, self-determination, higher education, employment, and community life for students, educators, parents, and service providers. Young adult self-advocates played a major role in this year's conference as presenters, panelists, mentors, and paid interns. Inspiration, motivation, and education was delivered by keynote speakers and over 50 breakout session presenters. In an effort to reach more transition-age students, the highly successful Tools for Life: Secondary Transition and Technology Fair will move to southeast Idaho in 2008, northern Idaho in 2009, and back to Boise 2010.



*"This has been an opportunity of a lifetime for my students that attended. Thank you!"
Special Educator*





*"We are going home empowered with the information we came for."
-Parent*



"Awesome conference and the dance was crazy awesome."

BSU Student/Self-Advocate

"I came away with so much information and ideas to help our students meet their dreams."

Service Provider

