

# Teaching life skills for smooth adult transitions

## Partnerships aid student transition

By Katherine Lacaze  
For Seaside Signal

New community partnerships will help the Seaside School District better provide students with intellectual and developmental disabilities the life skills to support a smooth transition to adulthood.

For many years, the school district has offered post-secondary transition services that include individual educational plans outlining the special education services a child identified with a disability will receive as part of his or her free and appropriate education, according to Jeremy Catt, director of special services.

“Our focus is on college and career readiness for all students, including students with disabilities,” he said. “The goal is to have a plan for their future as they leave school.”

This year, a main focus for the post-secondary transition program — which prepares students to move from high school to adult life utilizing comprehensive planning and coordinated activities — is to include more collaboration with outside agencies and community participation, Catt said.

“We want to continue this development of partnerships,” which provide for integrated employment and job skills development opportunities, he added.

Those partnerships include agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Youth Transition Program, Employment First, Disability Rights Oregon, Families and Communities Together and the local transition network facilitator.

## Setting high expectations

The statewide priorities for implementing post-secondary transition programs, according to Catt, are to decrease the number of students with developmental and intellectual disabilities who leave high school without a diploma and to increase employment training and vocational experiences during school that lead to better post-school outcomes.

“We need high expectations; we know high expectations lead to greater outcomes,” he said.

Currently, transition planning is required to begin for each impacted student starting at age 16. Services are offered until the student turns 21, “with the end result that it’s a seamless transition to adulthood,” Catt said.

The initial process of developing a transition plan explores the student’s post-secondary goals — whether they include



JEREMY CATT



the military, further education or entering the workforce — and what transition services and course study they need to meet those goals.

“It’s a very comprehensive process, and we take this part of our IEPs very seriously,” Catt said at the September district board meeting. “It’s very individualized on what the student wants to do and what they’re able to do.”

## Measuring program success

School districts are now required to annually complete interviews with all students who received special education services and left secondary school after the 2014-15 school year to gauge post-school outcomes. Survey questions asked if the individuals are working and how many hours; if they are connected with outside agencies; if they have a driver’s license; if they are receiving appropriate government benefits; and more.

“Post-school outcomes measure how effective our transition planning and ser-

vices are in preparing students for life after high school” and “help us continue to build our transition program,” Catt said.

The statewide priority for engagement is 73 percent of graduates; the district has a response rate of 82 percent.

The state Department of Education has identified a variety of predictors of post-high school success, including work study experiences, paid employment, a high school diploma, occupational courses, family expectations and involvement, career awareness, interagency collaboration and self-determination.

“The question is, are we doing these things and are we doing them well?” Catt said.

Feedback from surveys conducted in the spring showed Seaside students with intellectual and developmental disabilities who graduated in 2015 were working and generally had the services they need. The district found, however, a need to increase the paid employment for those students and “we are always looking at ways to improve” access to resources, Catt said.

## HOW IT WORKS

Jeremy Catt believes strengthening the collaboration and communication among the network that includes students, their families, community partners and district staff will result in better outcomes.

A snapshot of what this collaboration looks like is:

- Students with disabilities participating in paid employment opportunities with coaching, modeling and support from school staff or representatives from partnering agencies
- Working on job and life skills development at local businesses and organizations based on an assessment of the students’ preferences, interests and needs; and receiving direct instructions in the community setting in areas of social communication, resume development, interviewing skills, safety skill, independent living and recreation and leisure, to name a few.
- The intended mission of the transition program, Catt said, is that “every student with a disability will graduate with the individual skills needed to gain competitive employment and develop appropriate independent living skills in preparation for a full life.”

# Making Christmas more jolly for local foster kids

By Eve Marx  
For Seaside Signal

What says “Christmas” more than gifts and a turkey dinner? Plus a visit from Santa to boot? That’s why the Foster Children’s Christmas Party to be held in December in Seaside is so important.

Dan Arnoth, the chairman of the committee, sponsored by the Astoria Kiwanis Club, has been involved with the party for a long time. “Eighteen years ago I was asked to participate in a pot luck dinner with the foster children and the foster parents of Clatsop County,” Arnoth said.

“At the time there were about 40 foster children in the system and the event was held at the Seaside American Legion.” Since then, the number of children in foster care have swelled.

“Over the years, it’s turned into a full-blown Christmas dinner, the kids receive gifts, Santa shows up,” Arnoth said. “We serve from anywhere to 117 to 125 kids, aged newborn to 18 years. It’s a cooperative effort. We have sponsors from the Seaside and Warrenton Rotaries, the Warrenton Kiwanis, and the Astoria Kiwanis. The Astoria Kiwanis Club is the major sponsor this year, but we also get donations from all the area Lions Clubs and Kiwanis Clubs in the area. And the local high school Key Club members really help out.”

This year the annual event takes place Dec. 12 in Seaside. Due to the confidentiality and security of the children in the foster system, the exact location is not disclosed.

“The party is for the kids, but their foster families are also invited. Also some

of the natural (biological) parents are permitted to attend,” Arnoth said. “We always have some form of entertainment. This year the Astoria High School Choir will be singing carols. And of course Santa will make an appearance, and then we hand out gifts. Last year we served 210 people turkey, mashed potatoes with gravy, a green vegetable, cake. It’s a fun, happy, upbeat event.

The kids are always excited. Many of them are getting gifts they would otherwise not receive. I have four volunteers who will do the actual gift shopping. The wrapping is done by the Astoria High School Key Club and Seaside and Napa Key Clubs, who all serve as volunteers.”

Arnoth explained that the bulk of the funds collected to make the dinner happen comes from the sale of Christmas trees. “The biggest money comes from the Safeway in Astoria which begins selling Christmas trees starting the day after Thanksgiving,” he said. The tree sale is sponsored and undertaken by the Astoria Kiwanis.” He said it costs over \$5,000 to make the dinner happen. Donations are always welcome. Donations can be made to the Astoria Kiwanis Club, P.O. Box 209, Astoria OR 97103.

“I invite the principals of all the schools to come and see what we are doing,” Arnoth said. “I want them to see how much the kids enjoy it and what a worthy project this is.” He said it’s the kids who keep him going. “When you see the look on these kids’ faces and what they say when they sit on Santa’s knee ... well, that’s everything.”

Dan Arnoth can be reached at danarnoth@chart.net.



Dan Arnoth

TOP BRANDS. FACTORY-DIRECT PRICES.  
FREE COUPON BOOK AT WINE & BEER HAUS OR ONLINE,  
WWW.SEASIDEOUTLETS.COM

Seaside  
OUTLETS

KIWANIS  
TREES  
WILL BE  
FOR SALE  
NOV. 29TH

WHEN YOU GET  
YOUR CHRISTMAS  
TREE HERE, THE  
PROCEEDS GO TO  
KIWANIS CLUB,  
WHICH PUTS  
KIDS FIRST!

Find us on  
Facebook

REGULAR HOURS: MONDAY-SATURDAY 10-8, SUNDAY 10-6  
12<sup>TH</sup> AVE. & HWY. 101, SEASIDE, OR • 503.717.1603

**eomedia** group  
eomediagroup.com

Capital Press The West's Ag Weekly EAST OREGONIAN  
THE DAILY ASTORIAN WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN  
Blue Mountain EAGLE Signal Herald  
CHINOOK OBSERVER OREGON CAPITAL INSIDER

The most valuable and respected source of local news, advertising and information for our communities.

Signature SERIES By Budget Blinds®  
FALL REBATE EVENT

EARN UP TO A \$500 REBATE  
on Signature Series window coverings and motorized control.\*

NOVEMBER 1 thru DECEMBER 31, 2016

\* SOME EXCLUSIONS APPLY. SEE YOUR BUDGET BLINDS DEALER FOR MORE DETAILS

Budget Blinds  
a style for every point of view™

Oregon Coast 503-738-5242  
Lincoln City 541-994-9954  
SW Washington 503-738-5242  
www.budgetblinds.com