2017 Midwest Transition Institute: Race for Your Dreams

July in Indiana: Hot, Sticky, Stormy, Cool, Dry, and Sunny! No matter the weather (the weekend included all of these conditions), the 2017 Midwest Transition Institute was a big success for youth who are deaf-blind. Race For Your Dreams was held July 13th through the 16th in Terre Haute, Indiana. The Institute was hosted by the Indiana Deaf-Blind Services Project on the campus of Indiana State University (ISU). This exciting weekend was designed for teenagers who are deaf-blind and their families. They came from six states (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin) to listen to inspiring deaf-blind presenters, meet with mentors, find out about transition resources and enjoy a variety of fun-filled and well-planned activities. Transition Brief #15 provides some highlights and pictures of the participants as they “race for their dreams.”
Throughout the weekend, there were numerous presentations and events in which the youth and their families were able to participate. Some highlights include:

Bryen Yunashko, a deaf-blind advocate from Illinois used examples from his own life during his Friday presentation to emphasize the importance of youth being self-advocates as well as identifying themselves as members of a deaf-blind culture.

Mimi Huybers, a parent representative with IN*SOURCE (Indiana parent information training center) shared details about the educational transition process for high school youth as well as a number of resources for parents. Mimi also facilitated a panel of family members whose daughters and sons who are deaf-blind have gone through the educational transition process. Their stories about vocational training, jobs, academics, social activities, learning to be independent, and community involvement provided valuable information and insights for the families.

While family members were meeting, the young adults who are deaf-blind enjoyed an afternoon adventure of outdoor challenge activities at the ISU Sycamore Outdoor Center. Activities included: zip-lining, rope climbing, and outdoor games.

Lots of cheers of encouragement were heard from the teens as their peers participated in the activities.

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Friday evening provided time for each youth who are deaf-blind to participate in a talent show for their families and the other participants. A good time was had by all as these young people each took 3-5 minutes to showcase their talents (singing, dancing, comic stand-up, skits, game playing demonstrations, playing the piano, and a service dog demonstration).

Jason Corning from the Washington DC area (formerly a Wisconsin resident) gathered all of the young adults in front of him on Saturday morning for his presentation, “On the Move”. His talk traced his life’s journey, including all of his successes as well as some of the challenges he met along the way. His message to the youth was one of having high expectations for their own success and of setting individual goals for achievement. The advantages of technology and personal contacts also were emphasized.

The youth and their mentors participated in some role-playing activities on Saturday morning. The youth were given a scenario of a young woman who was deaf-blind who was preparing for a job interview and, after she got the job, for a staff meeting. The young adults had multiple opportunities, as the scenario played out, to make suggestions and comments that would help the woman with her interview and staff meeting. The role playing provided an informal and fun opportunity for everyone to do some problem-solving.
Jill Gaus, an adult who is deaf-blind adult with the Deaf-Blind Project in Michigan, talked with families throughout the day on Saturday, sharing her own story and stressing the importance of families making sure their children always are aware of their own accomplishments and strengths. Jill was able to share a number of valuable resources for families.

A Resource Fair was held on Saturday. Eight vendors were available to share information about their organizations. The young adults attended the Fair separately from their families. The teens had already prepared questions they wanted to ask the vendors. Family members also had an opportunity to visit with each of the resource vendors.

At the end of the day on Saturday, each of the youth were able to meet with the project staff from their state to develop her/his own action plan. Each action plan was designed to help the young adults, based partially on what they had learned at the Institute, come up with next steps as they move along their own transition path.

Kudos to Everyone. An event like the 2017 Transition Institute does not just happen. Months of planning, preparation by personnel, as well as financial resources were essential and evident as the weekend unfolded. Each of the deaf-blind projects in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin deserve kudos for recruiting students to attend and for supporting the Institute. The National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness contributed both personnel and financial resources, as did staff from the Mississippi Deaf- Blind Project. Great thanks also must go to all of the interpreters, support service providers, mentors, photographers, and support staff. Without their invaluable assistance this could not have been such a successful event for all of the participants.

Who Can Help?

Check out the Midwest Transition Institute Facebook page for lots of pictures of the weekend’s activities (https://www.facebook.com/MidwestTransitionInstitute17/), as well as “Karen’s Komments at https://www.indbservices.org/ for more details about the Institute. Future Transition Briefs, from time to time, also will feature some specific topics that were part of the content from the 2017 Midwest Transition Institute: Race for Your Dreams. Stay tuned!