



# easterseals

## Massachusetts

# College Navigator

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MARYELLEN MACRAE, DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES  
ALEXANDRA ULLRICH, PROGRAM MANAGER,  
TRANSITION & EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

# What we are doing at Easterseals?

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Identifying the problem

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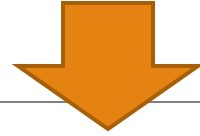
Looking at unmet needs

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The creation of our College Navigator  
program



# Students with Disabilities in Higher Education



80% of students with Autism  
Spectrum Disorder drop out

86% of students with psychiatric  
disabilities drop out

**94%** vs. **17%**

High school vs. college students with learning disabilities who receive academic assistance



**67%**

of students with disabilities enroll in post-secondary education



**<41%**

of students with disabilities who enroll in college graduate within 8 years

# Goals of College Navigator Program

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- Help identify potential barriers and problem solve around them with college staff
- Advocate with the student on identifying their needs and being able to explain them to college staff
- Create a supportive environment between the college and student to ensure success
- Improve outcomes for students with disabilities completing higher education

# Services offered

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- Setting personal schedules (time and organizational management)
- In-depth orientation & mobility
- Assistive technology integration
- Academic redirection and focus
- Collaboration with disability services
- Develop an action plan for each semester of college



# Desired Outcomes

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- Lasting higher educational commitment leading to graduation
- Social experiences leading to lifelong relationships
- Matriculation among peers with and without disabilities contributing to the average norm
- Higher employment potential



# College: How it's different from high school

College students must...

- Meet academic criteria and qualifications for initial **and** continued enrollment
- Monitor their own progress
- Be their own advocate
- Give consent for the college to speak with their parent/guardian

College students are...

- Responsible for their own success
- **Not** entitled to the same services and supports that they received in high school



# Higher Education Options

- Two year college
- Four year college
- Dual enrollment
- Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative
- Auditing courses
- Online courses (some specific to students with disabilities)
- Trade school
- Colleges with specialty services (U of I, Landmark, etc.)



# Accommodations in College

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- The student's responsibility
- Do not transfer from high school
- Type of documents needed range
- Have to be considered "reasonable"

**Young Adults with Learning Disabilities:**  
**Only 17% received accommodation and supports** in college because of their disability, compared to 94% in high school.

( National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014)

# Well, what is considered “unreasonable?”

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Any accommodation that...

- Fundamentally alters the nature of a program
- Lowers or waives essential academic requirements
- Results in undue financial or administrative burdens



# Examples of Accommodations

In the  
classroom



- Copies of notes
- Use of assistive technology
- Reduced barriers for physical access to classroom

For exams



- Extended time
- Separate testing room
- Readers
- Scribes
- Use of computer for essay exams

In general



- Reduced course load
- Priority registration
- Waiver from foreign language requirement

# Why aren't students disclosing?

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- Want to distance themselves from the “label”
- Unaware of the resources available
- Accommodation process is difficult or unclear
- Assumption on the quality and usefulness of services
- Negative previous experiences

# Challenges freshmen are facing...

- Adjusting to independence and freedom
- Less institutional support
- Weak executive functioning skills
- Resistance to change
- Lack of knowledge of resources on campus
- Navigating accommodation process
- Unable to self-advocate



# Our Approach

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- Individualized on campus support
- Establishing routine and accountability
- Connecting student to on-campus resources
- Assistive technology



# What some colleges are implementing

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- Classes for study skills/time management
- Transition programs
- Tutors for learning strategies
- Peer mentoring
- Workshops on study skills and time management



# How to help students

Educate students  
about the  
transition to  
college

- Rights and disability laws
- Campus resources
- Using accommodations

Build skills

- Self-advocacy, time management, organization etc.

Encourage self-  
awareness

- Understanding their own diagnosis and how to explain it to others
- Ability to identify the help needed for them to be successful

# Stanley's Background

## Early Education

- Speech delay
- Early intervention classroom age 3
- Integrated private school age 5

## Elementary and Middle School

- Attended local Massachusetts public elementary school
- Attended Amherst Regional Middle School

## High School

- Took classes and work seriously
- Explored art courses
- Graduated as valedictorian





# COLLEGE





# Stanley's College Adjustments

## Challenges

- New environment
- Lack of social support
- Biases in college staff and limited accommodations

## Goals

- Becoming a better advocate
- Joining social groups
- Reminding me to follow up

## Emotional Support

- Nice checking in weekly
- Encouraging and understanding
- Talking about serious issues



# A Mother's Perspective



# Victoria's College Adjustments

## Challenges

- New environment - barriers for parents
- Biases in college staff and limited Communication
- Being weary

## Goals

- Becoming a different kind of advocate
- Getting support
- Ensuring Stanley is successful
- Ensuring others are successful

## Emotional Support

- Someone to bounce ideas off of
- Encouraging and understanding
- Talking about serious issues



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