



Transition from School to Adult Life

A Guide to Navigating the Leap from
School to Adult Programs and Services
in Northern Virginia



This guide is one of six developed for parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities under the auspices of The Arc of Northern Virginia's Transition POINTS program. Transition POINTS focuses on key life decision points: receiving a diagnosis and having a child with a disability enter an early intervention program; school and special education; transitioning out of the school system; securing employment or day services; finding a place to live outside the caregiver's home; and aging with a disability.

All of the guides can be found at
<https://thearcofnova.org/program/transition-points>.

As information changes, updated content and resources may be found in the Resource Library on our website at <https://thearcofnova.org/resource-library>.

This is not a legal document and does not spell out your or your child's rights and responsibilities under the law. Every effort has been made to verify the information in the document, but please be aware that items such as program regulations, deadlines, and contact information can change. Referrals to organizations and individuals are for informational purposes and do not constitute an endorsement of their services.

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INTRODUCTION

Parenting is a journey full of love, challenges, and hope, and when your child has intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), that journey may follow paths less traveled—but no less meaningful. As a parent, you’ve already demonstrated immense strength and care by seeking ways to support your child’s growth and well-being. Planning for their future might feel overwhelming at times, but it’s also an opportunity to dream, prepare, and create a foundation for their happiness and security.

The Arc of Northern Virginia’s Transition POINTS Guides are here to walk with you through this process and navigate crucial decisions across the lifespan. It’s not about predicting every step ahead, but about equipping you with knowledge, resources, and a sense of empowerment. Transition from School to Adult Life explores practical strategies for education, employment or meaningful day activities, financial planning, independent living, and building a support network that honors your child’s unique potential.

The path may come with challenges, but it’s important to remember that you are not alone. Countless parents, caregivers, professionals, and communities are on this journey alongside you, offering guidance and support. Every step forward—no matter how small—can make a meaningful difference in your child’s future.

This guide aims to be realistic but hopeful, grounded in the knowledge that your love and commitment are the most powerful tools you have. With thoughtful planning and determination, you can help your child thrive and navigate a world full of possibilities.

Transition from School to Adult Life provides an overview of the life planning topics you should consider at this stage. For most of the topics covered in this guide, including Social Security and Medicaid, we offer handouts in the Resource Library <https://thearcofnova.org/resource-library> on our website that provide additional detailed information to better understand and navigate these complex topics.

ABOUT TRANSITION POINTS

Families need realistic, actionable information with which they can make a wide range of decisions as their child grows. Providing this information is the mission of The Arc of Northern Virginia’s Transition POINTS program (Providing Opportunities, Information, Networking and Transition Support).

Transition POINTS focuses on six key decision points in the lifetime of an individual with an intellectual disability:

1. Receiving a diagnosis and having a child enter an early intervention program.
2. Starting school and entering the special education system.
3. Transitioning out of the school system to adulthood.
4. Entering the world of work.
5. Finding a home.
6. Aging with a disability.



For each transition point, we provide materials in both print and digital formats, online resources, workshops, and webinars. All of these materials can be found on our website at www.thearcofnova.org. The Arc of Northern Virginia maintains a library of informative life-planning videos and webinars on our YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/VideosatTheArcofNoVA>.

The Arc of Northern Virginia holds an annual Transition Series. The webinars, slides, and transition related resources can be found on our website at <https://thearcofnova.org/transition-series>.

The information found in this guide is applicable to all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, although much of the contact information for resources are particular to the Northern Virginia area. To explore resources specific to your local community, contact the Community Services Board (CSB) in your region. You can find your local CSB by visiting DBHDS (Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services) at <https://dbhds.virginia.gov/community-%20services-boards-csbs/>. The CSB is the point of entry into the public funded system of services for people with mental health needs, intellectual and developmental disabilities. Also, visit The Arc of Virginia at www.thearcofva.org to find the local Arc chapter in your community. To find the local Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services in your area, visit <https://www.dars.virginia.gov>.

A CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS

STEP TO TAKE BY AGE	CHECK IF DONE	NOTES
ASAP		
Organize key documents pg. 24		
Create a will pg. 25		
Establish a Special Needs Trust pg. 54		
Apply for a Medicaid DD Waiver to get on the waitlist pg. 40		
Determine if your child is eligible for Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid pg. 45		
AGES 12-14		
Keep record of child's aptitudes, vocational & leisure interests pg. 76		
Discuss child's needs with local therapeutic recreation department pg. 104		
Have child begin to attend IEP meetings		

STEP TO TAKE BY AGE	CHECK IF DONE	NOTES
AGE 14-16		
Include transition goals in IEP, as well as transportation, post-secondary, and independent living goals		
If using public transit, apply for Metro reduced-fare card or MetroAccess. Explore travel training. Fare for local public transportation (ex. Cue Bus, DASH,ART is free for high school students. Apply at your local high school) pg. 107		
Contact your local DARS office to apply for Pre-ETS (Employment and Transition Services) pg. 11		
Explore eligibility for adult services with school or CSB; complete application and release of information forms pg. 40		
Attend The Arc of Northern Virginia's virtual Transition Lunch & Learn sessions and/ or our Annual Transition Series, or join our Transition Parent Support Group pg. 21		
Learn about The Arc of Northern Virginia's Tech for Independent Living Program to build independent living skills pg. 70		

STEP TO TAKE BY AGE	CHECK IF DONE	NOTES
AGE 16-18		
If college-bound, research colleges & visit campuses; meet w/ disability support services pg. 35		
If not yet done, contact your local DARS office to apply for Pre-ETS Services pg. 32		
Research employment and/or day support services; If the goal is independent, competitive employment then contact your local DARS office to apply for Vocational Rehabilitative (VR) Services pg. 84		
Determine eligibility for adult services through appropriate local agency (CSB) pg. 40		
Build a Supported Decision Making team. Visit our SDM Library to learn more and get started https://thearcofnova.org/sdm pg. 60		
AGE 17 (OR 12-18 MO. BEFORE LEAVING SCHOOL)		
For college-bound, take required tests; arrange interviews and tours. Meet with office of disability services & determine eligibility for on-campus services pg. 35		
Research and do informational interviews with employment & day support providers pg. 84		

STEP TO TAKE BY AGE	CHECK IF DONE	NOTES
FALL OF SENIOR YEAR		
Apply to post-secondary schools pg. 35		
NO EARLIER THAN 17 YRS., 6 MONTHS		
Explore legal options such as powers of attorney, limited guardianship, guardianship. Contact attorney if needed pg. 62		
90 DAYS BEFORE 18TH BIRTHDAY		
If your child has Medicaid before their 18th birthday, start the Disability Determination Process. For more information visit the Medicaid section in our Resource Library at https://thearcofnova.org/resource-library pg. 48		

STEP TO TAKE BY AGE	CHECK IF DONE	NOTES
1 MONTH BEFORE 18TH BIRTHDAY		
If necessary, have attorney prepare final documents for new legal relationship pg. 62		
AT AGE 18		
If establishing Power of Attorney, this can be completed beginning on the 18th birthday pg. 62		
Apply for Supplementary Security Income (SSI) the month after your child turns 18 pg. 45		
If your child is male, register for the Selective Service https://www.sss.gov/register		

STEP TO TAKE BY AGE	CHECK IF DONE	NOTES
AGE 18–22		
Update will. Inform family about wills, trusts, and other legal supports pg. 53		
Create a Letter of Intent pg. 25		
Explore adult recreational & social opportunities pg. 104		
Prepare resume, do situational assessments, go on job interviews pg. 77		
Once approved for SSI, apply for Medicaid pg. 45		
If working, learn about managing income and Social Security benefits pg. 48		

STEP TO TAKE BY AGE	CHECK IF DONE	NOTES
AGE 18-22 (CONTINUED)		
If not already done, determine eligibility for Medicaid Waivers and contact CSB for an intake pg. 40		
If not yet done, contact your local DARS office to apply for Pre-ETS and/or Vocational Rehab Services pg. 32		
If not yet done, obtain Metro reduced-rate transit fare cards/ID card. Apply for MetroAccess if needed pg. 107		
Explore housing resources as you plan for the future pg. 97		
AGE 20-22		
Before graduating, determine the service provider that best suits your child's needs for either employment or day support services pg. 84		
Determine potential use of public transportation or specialized transportation services. Explore travel training. pg. 107		



GENERAL NOTES

When children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) transition out of the school system, it marks a significant shift in how services are accessed and provided. Unlike the entitlement-based supports offered through schools under federal laws like IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), adult services are not guaranteed. Instead, families must navigate a complex system of providers, eligibility requirements, and funding sources. This transition can feel overwhelming, but understanding the options and planning ahead can help ensure continued support for your child’s needs as they move into adulthood in the areas of employment, meaningful day supports, recreation, and housing.

The Center on Transition Innovations at VCU offers Tips on Transition Planning for Parents at www.centerontransition.org. Visit their website for virtual courses, guides, videos and webcasts on transition planning.

- 1. Love your child unconditionally, believe in him or her, provide encouragement, dream big!** You are your child’s biggest advocate. Support and love them as only parents can in this exciting time. *Throw a graduation party that highlights your child’s strengths and dreams. Create a “Dream Board” to show their goals – college, a job, living independently, etc.*
- 2. Insist on student voice.** The student’s voice should be present whenever he or she is the subject of conversation. *Redirect people to speak to your child instead of you, and allow them time to respond. If your child uses alternative communication, ensure the tools are ready and used.*
- 3. Increase student involvement with the transition process.** A great way to build self-determination for a young adult with a disability is through the IEP process. *Prepare your child for the IEP meeting and have them attend. Have your child create slides or a poster presentation about themselves for the IEP meeting, and include their strengths, needs, preferences, and future goals.*
- 4. Research resources and do your homework.** It is easy to become overwhelmed with emotions during the transition process. Researching best options and practices provides a powerful tool to advocate for your child. *Create a binder or digital folder with resources and contact information. Participate in a support group with other parents to share information.*
- 5. Be open-minded and think outside the box.** Just because it’s never been done, doesn’t mean that it can’t be done. It can never hurt to discuss an idea concerning transition. *If your child dreams of something unconventional, explore alternatives such as creating small business opportunities like pet-sitting, art creation, etc.*
- 6. Collaborate with adult services.** Community adult services provide valuable support and programming once your child exits school services. Learning about the various services and building relationships with providers early will ease the transition to adult services. *Talk with the Transition Coordinator at your child’s high school and the Transition Case Manager at the CSB. Talk with other parents and conduct informational interviews with providers.*
- 7. Increase family involvement in the transition planning process.** Your child is the center of the IEP and you know your child best! The more the family is involved, the more your child’s voice will be heard. *Hold a family vision meeting and build a circle of support and/or a supported decision-making team. Identify ways each family member can support them whether it is helping teach a life skill, participate in a recreational activity or being a cheerleader.*

Consider connecting with other parents who are on similar paths to learn from one another, build community, and discover resources as you navigate this transition. The Arc of Northern Virginia offers virtual monthly Transition Lunch and Learn sessions and monthly alternating in-person and virtual Transition Parent Support Group meetings. To learn more and register, visit our website at <https://thearcofnova.org/workshops>. Social Grace <https://socialgrace.com> offers monthly parent support groups. Join the Northern Virginia’s Developmental Disability Group, a free online community started by families for families at <https://novaddgroupgenius.com>.

NOTES

FIRST IEP MY CHILD JOINED?

DATE I FIRST OPENED THIS GUIDE?

TWO IDEAS I WANT TO EXPLORE OR MAKE SURE WE DO?

FAMILY MEMBERS INVOLVED IN PLANNING?

ONE CREATIVE THING I WANT TO TRY?

Exploring School Resources and Adult Service Providers

All of the Northern Virginia public school systems host transition related resource fairs throughout the year to help families learn about adult providers and resources. High school transition representatives can also give you more information on the following adult service events held throughout the year. All school systems also operate a family or parent resource center that offers free webinars, confidential consultations, a lending library, and resources to help adults support the success of all students, including those with learning challenges, special needs, and disabilities.

Moving on to Life Resource Fair – for students and their families transitioning from high school to adult services. It is held annually in the fall hosted by FCPS.

Flash Forward – focuses on Post-Secondary Education & Employment Options. Held annually in the spring and hosted by FCPS.

Middle School Transition Fair – held annually in the spring and hosted by FCPS. This event provides information to elementary and middle school students and their families as they prepare for the transition to high school. Students and families can explore CTS elective courses, programs, services, and postsecondary supports.

Arlington, Alexandria, Loudoun, and Prince William County Public Schools also hold transition fairs during the school year. Contact the Parent Resources Center in your city or county to learn more.

Northern Virginia’s Developmental Disability Group (NOVA IDD) is a free online community started by families for families at <https://novaddgroupgenius.com/> and offers an online resource to connect to school and service providers.

FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS:

ALEXANDRIA CITY PRC

<https://www.acps.k12.va.us/departments/teaching-learning-leadership/office-of-specialized-instruction/special-education-parent-resource-center>

Anne R. Lipnick Special Education Parent Resource Center

Alexandria City High School Minnie Howard Campus
3801 West Braddock Road, Room 134
Alexandria, VA 22302

ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS PRC

<https://www.apsva.us/parent-resource-center>
2110 Washington Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22204
703-228-7239
prc@apsva.us

FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

<https://www.fcps.edu/frc>

DUNN LORING CENTER FOR PARENT SERVICES

2334 Gallows Road, Rm 105, Dunn Loring, VA 22027
frc@fcps.edu
703-204-3941

LOUDOUN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS PARENT RESOURCE SERVICES

<https://www.lcps.org/o/lcps/page/parent-resource-services>
21000 Education Court, Ashburn, VA 20148
571-252-1000

PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY PARENT RESOURCE CENTER

https://www.pwcs.edu/academics___programs/special_education/parent_resource_center/index
Kelly Leadership Center
Second Floor, Suite 2200, 14715 Bristow Road, Manassas, VA 20112
703-791-7935

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**MASON AUTISM SUPPORT INITIATIVE (MASI)
AT GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

<https://ds.gmu.edu/masil>

Is a comprehensive, fee-based program that provides additional support services to students on the Autism Spectrum beyond typical higher education accommodations. MASI uses a team-based approach to assist students in achieving their goals in college.

MASON EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING PROGRAM

<https://ds.gmu.edu/efp>

is a program offered through Disability Services that provides individualized services beyond standard accommodations for students diagnosed with disabilities related to executive functioning. Through the program, students have access to weekly meetings with a Learning Coach. Learning Coaches are typically graduate students or professionals with experience in a related field and provide up to 3 hours a week of support.

COLLEGE LIVING EXPERIENCE

www.experiencecle.com

Provides post-secondary supports to young adults with varying disabilities.
Montgomery College, 401 North Washington Street, Suite 420
Rockville, MD

COLLEGE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM (CIP)

www.cipworldwide.org

A comprehensive post-secondary support program for young adults on the autism spectrum and for those with learning differences.

Below are local one-on-one fee-based support options available to assist families in the transition to higher education. Personalized resources, such as coaches and mentorship programs, provide tailored guidance to help students build independence, navigate academic and social expectations, and access necessary accommodations.

BASS EDUCATIONAL SERVICES, LLC

www.basseducationalservices.com

Provides educational consultation for families and students with learning differences.

SPECTRUM TRANSITION COACHING

<https://spectrumtransitioncoaching.com>

Offers one-on-one support to families and young adults with Autism to navigate the transition from school to college and adult life.

ACCESSIBLE COLLEGE

<https://accessiblecollege.com>

Provides college preparation and transition support for students with physical disabilities and health conditions.



NOTES

COLLEGES EXPLORED?	DECISIONS?
	DECISION SUBMITTED?
TOURS?	MOVE-IN DATE?
	ACCOMMODATIONS NEEDED?
APPLICATIONS DUE?	MET WITH OFFICE OF DISABILITY?
APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED?	ACCOMMODATIONS REQUESTED?



NOTES

DATE APPLIED FOR DD WAIVER?	DATE SENT IN WAIVER PAPERWORK?
DATE VIDES COMPLETED?	DATE APPLIED FOR CCC PLUS WAIVER?
WAIVER STATUS ? <i>(waiting list priority or have Waiver)</i>	NAME OF WAIVER SUPPORT COORDINATOR?
LAST TIME TALKED TO CSB?	ON IFSP EMAIL LIST IF ON THE WAITING LIST?
YEARS APPLIED FOR IFSP AND WHAT REQUESTED?	

SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY PROGRAMS

You may begin the application process for Social Security benefits the month after your child turns 18. The first step is to determine eligibility for any benefit program; the Social Security Administration (SSA) will decide which program is appropriate. For webinar presentations on SSI/SSDI visit The Arc of Northern Virginia’s YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@VideosatTheArcofNoVA>.

SSI VS. SSDI

For both Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), a person must meet SSA’s definition of disability. Disability is defined as the inability to engage in Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) by reason of any medical (physical and/or mental or blind) impairment. Your disability must have lasted or be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months or result in death. For 2025, the wage limit for the SGA is \$1,620 gross income/month.

SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI)

SSI is a cash assistance program for those with limited income AND who are either 65 years old or older or blind or disabled. Adult SSI beneficiaries must have limited income and resources (\$2,000 in assets); parents’ income does not count for adult applicants. You do not have to have any work history. Monthly benefit payments are determined by the current benefit rate (\$967 a month in 2025), minus any “countable income.” If eligible for SSI, you will also be eligible for Medicaid. ** Note: It can take close to one year to begin receiving payment, but back payments will go back to the date of the approved application.

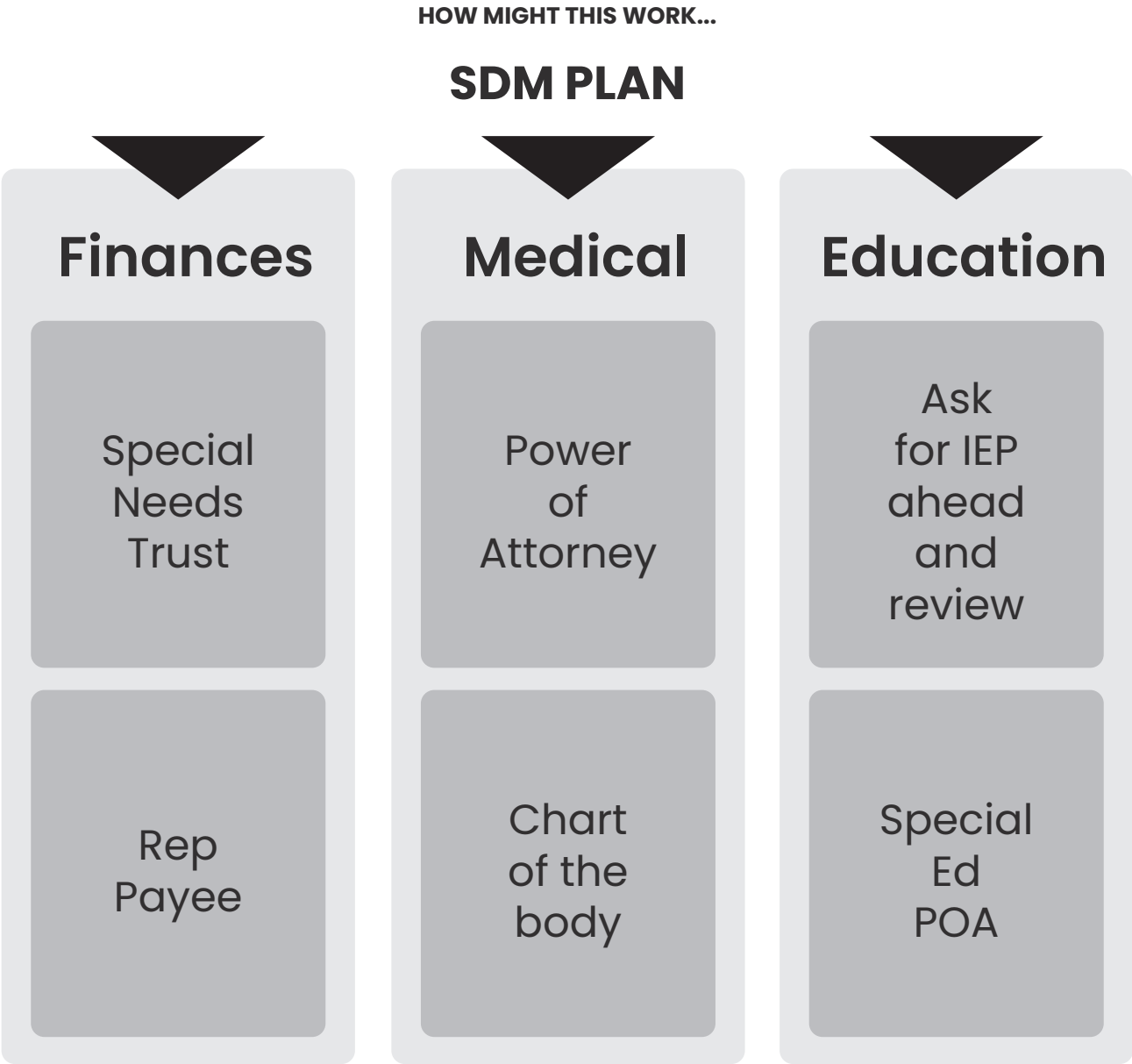
SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY INSURANCE (SSDI)

While SSI is a needs-based program, SSDI is an insurance program with benefits dependent on previous payments into the system. In other words, SSDI beneficiaries must have worked enough (or their parents or spouses must have worked long enough) to have made contributions into FICA. Monthly benefit payments are based on the worker’s lifetime average earnings covered by Social Security.

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Supported Decision Making can be used with all forms of legal authority and various support options

SDM doesn't involve any cost or court relationship. It is a matter of working as a team to present information to the person with a disability in a way they understand it and using guiding principles important to the person to help them. You can use tools like Powers of Attorney, Special Needs Trust, or any other options that will be helpful in ensuring the person with a disability gets the right support. You can see a sample SDM agreement, along with tips on filling it out and educating selected supporters, at <https://dbhds.virginia.gov/supported-decision-making-supported-decision-making-agreements>.



For more examples of how SDM can be used in all aspects of life, see 100 Ways to Use Supported Decision Making on our website at <https://thearcofnova.org/sdm>.

**NOTES**

EXPLORED DECISION MAKING OPTIONS?	
OPTIONS TO TRY FIRST?	SDM PLAN CREATION DATE AND LOCATION WHERE KEPT?
POWER OF ATTORNEY CREATION DATE AND LOCATION WHERE KEPT?	GUARDIANSHIP/CONSERVATORSHIP EXPLORED?
ATTORNEY CONTACTED?	COURT DATE?
DATE FINALIZED AND QUALIFIED?	COPIES KEPT?

THE ARC OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA’S TECH FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM (TFIL)
TECHNOLOGY TO EMPOWER YOUNG ADULTS FOR TRANSITION

At the heart of the program is Arc2Independence, our app designed to support individuals with managing daily routines and overcoming challenges. The app offers a comprehensive library of lessons in key areas, including Transportation, Daily Living Skills, Employment, and Safety, accessible on phones, tablets, or computers. We also offer free, customized virtual lessons, the program provides essential tools to build independence and confidence in navigating everyday life. With a variety of options and personalized lessons, young adults can learn new skills, practice routines, and achieve goals. Arc2Independence is a reliable tool that provides virtual support, like a travel trainer or job coach, tailored to your personal goals. To learn more, visit our website at <https://thearcofnova.org/program/tfil>, contact techforindependence@thearcofnova.org, or sign up for our virtual information session, Building Independence with the TFIL Team at <https://thearcofnova.org/tfil-events>.

If you live outside of the Northern Virginia and are interested in accessing the Arc2Independence app, contact arc2independence@thearcofnova.org.



NOTES

DATE APPLIED TO VOTE?	SELF-ADVOCACY OPTIONS EXPLORED?
OTHER WAYS OR PLANS TO DEVELOP ADULT SKILLS?	PRECINCT INFORMATION?
FIRST TIME VOTING?	ATTENDED TECH FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM EVENT?
APPLIED FOR TECH FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING?	TECH FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING CONTACT?



GENERAL NOTES

POSITIVE PERSONAL PROFILE

Name: _____ Date: _____

DREAMS AND GOALS:

INTERESTS:

TALENTS, SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE:

LEARNING STYLES:

VALUES:

POSITIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS:

ENVIRONMENTAL PREFERENCES:

DISLIKES:

WORK EXPERIENCES:

SUPPORT SYSTEM:

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES:

SOLUTIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS:

CAREER IDEAS, COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND POSSIBILITIES TO EXPLORE:



GENERAL NOTES

PARENT EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY TRAINING CENTER (PEATC)

<https://peatc.org>

PEATC offers one-on-one consultations, trainings, workshops, webinars, and fact sheets on navigating special education and transition planning.

PACERS (NATIONAL PARENT CENTER ON TRANSITION AND EMPLOYMENT)

<http://www.pacer.org/transition/learning-center/independent-community-living/self-determination.asp>

Offers resources for families, educators, and professionals to support effective transition planning. The center emphasizes self-advocacy, family engagement, and inclusive practices to improve outcomes for young people with disabilities.

PARENT CENTER HUB

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org>

Is a central resource for the network of Parent Centers across the U.S. It provides information, tools, and training materials to support families of children with disabilities. The Hub offers resources on special education, transition to adulthood, and family engagement, helping parents navigate services and advocate effectively for their children’s needs.

