

# Designing Meaningful Work Experiences

Presenter: Kimberly Norris-Scrano

February 11, 2021

**Rural Institute**



# Captioning and Housekeeping

- Open the captioning web page in a new browser window. You can click the link posted in the Chat box. The link is also displayed here: <https://us.ai-live.com/CaptionViewer/Join/thirdparty?sessionId=USTR1102A>
- Adjust the captioning window using the drop-down menus at the top of the browser.
- Click back to the webinar browser and position the window to sit directly above the captioning.
- This session is being recorded. By participating in the webinar, you grant permission for any “chats” and/or questions you submit through the webinar platform to be recorded.



**Rural Institute**  
For Inclusive Communities



**This project is funded in whole or in part under a contract with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. The statements herein do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Department.**



**Rural Institute**  
For Inclusive Communities

**The Montana Deaf-Blind Project is supported by grant #H326T180038 from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The statements herein do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Department.**



## MT Deaf-Blind Project

**HOME** ABOUT MTDB WHAT IS DEAF-BLINDNESS? PROJECT INITIATIVES  
RESOURCES EVENTS & TRAINING

EARLY IDENTIFICATION & REFERRAL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ASSESSMENT, PLANNING & INSTRUCTION TRANSITION  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NATIONAL CHILD COUNT

### CONTACT US

Montana Deaf-Blind Project  
Rural Institute  
41 Corbin Hall  
Univ. of MT  
Missoula, MT 59812

Phone: 406.243.4134

Fax: 406.243.4730

[MTDeafBlind@mso.umt.edu](mailto:MTDeafBlind@mso.umt.edu)

[Contact Form](#)



# Poll

In what capacity do you support individuals with a significant impact of disability?

- A. As a parent or other close family member
- B. As an educator (paraprofessional, general or special education teacher)
- C. As a behavior specialist or therapist (OT, PT or Speech)
- D. "I don't have a connection to disability, but I want to learn more!"
- G. Other (please list in the Chat box)

# Designing Meaningful Work Experiences

Presented by-  
Kim Norris-  
Scrano  
Inspired by-  
Alana Scrano

In partnership  
with-  
University of  
Montana  
Montana Deaf-  
Blind Project  
Rural Institute  
Transition  
and Employment  
Projects

February 11, 2021

Filling KONG toys at  
Yellowstone Valley  
Animal Shelter.



Dropping dog treats  
for drive-thru bank  
customers.



Delivering a  
donation of  
"training treats"  
to Montana  
Women's Prison  
for their Prison  
PAWS program.



Shelving  
children's DVDs  
at Billings Public  
Library.

Quick recap from November's webinar...



My daughter, Alana, is a 2019 graduate of Hysham High in rural eastern Montana. She was born with a significant impact of disability connected to her rare chromosome difference. She continues to live with those who love her most (Mom, Dad and siblings Sal-10, Serena-8 and Cecelia-6 years old), and she takes great pride in caring for her farm critters.

Nearly 5 years ago, in a season of frustration, I pondered and settled on a "Life Goal" for Alana. "To live an engaged life full of joy and purpose that is rich in personal relationships," and it's been our mantra ever since. At about the same time, we started a Facebook page for her called, "Alana - A Jill of All Trades," and our hobby business and volunteering ventures began.

-Preferred tasks (passions) are important even when they seem inconsequential. Activities like-

- Pouring
- Dumping
- Egg Cracking
- Pushing Buttons on Kitchen Appliances
- Opening Cabinet Doors...

...truly matter when they give purpose and joy to an individual with a significant impact of disability.

-The simplest of interests can open the floodgates of possibility into the vocational realm and beyond. The above list inspired baking dog treats!

-The development of a "Life Goal" helps to focus a vision and to wrap supports around that vision.

## Goals for Today's Webinar-

1- With a defined "Life Goal" and an assortment of preferred tasks, start to identify and pull in the champions (cheerleaders, believers). Then, together, dream of (and mobilize) a bright future for the youth in transition while holding space for the skeptics.

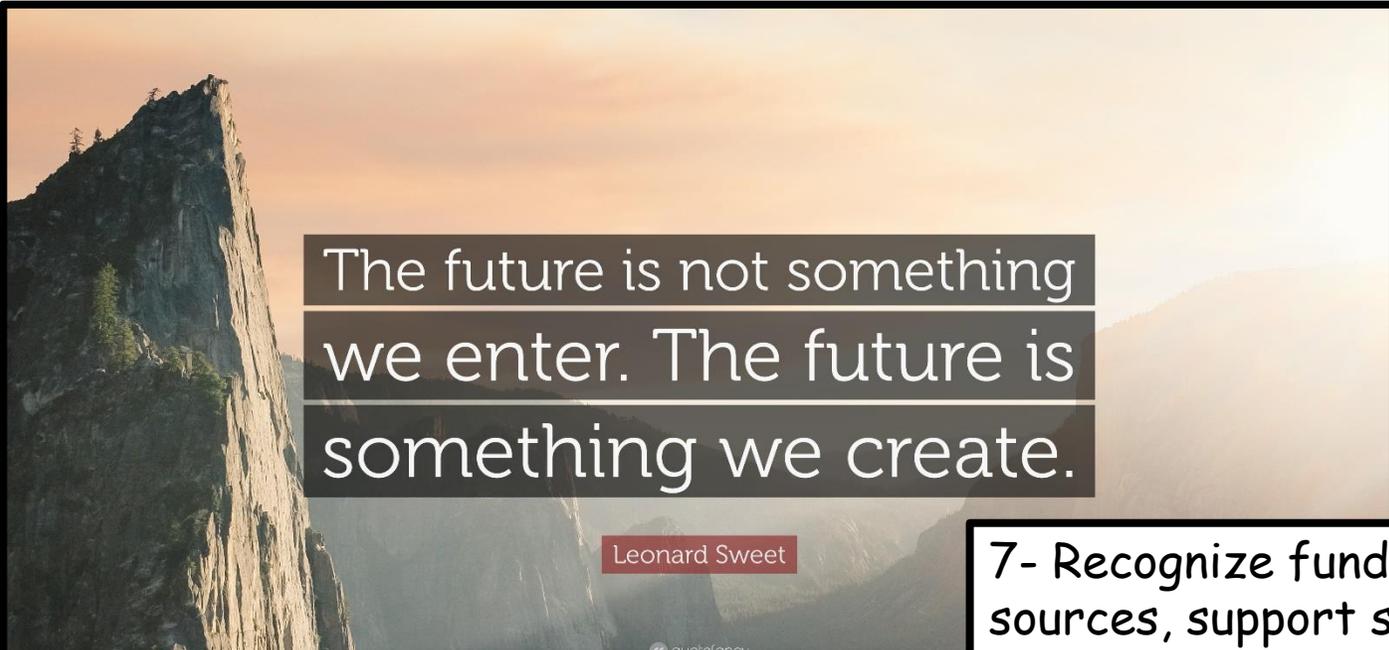
2- Discover how the foundations of opportunity for individuals with a significant impact of disability lie in relationships, presence and the positive attitudes of their support personnel.

3- Clarify "Must Haves" and "Can't Stands" as you take preferred tasks into community-based work experiences.

4- Understand how to grow new opportunity while also ensuring long term projects remain sustainable.

5- Value being intentional in the delivery of goods or services. Understand "what" your product is aside from the obvious!

6- Learn how to build a network of supporters (business partners, repeat customers and fans).



The future is not something we enter. The future is something we create.

Leonard Sweet

7- Recognize funding sources, support services and agencies that can assist an individual with a significant impact of disability as they develop meaningful work experiences.

8- Believe in a bright future for youth in transition, especially those with a significant impact of disability!

Alana's Life Goal is-  
"To live an engaged life full of joy and purpose that is rich in personal relationships."

So, I asked myself, "Who will rally behind this goal? Who will help us dream and hope? Who will lift us up when we stumble? Who will celebrate our successes, both big and small?"

These are the folks we invited in (often informally) when considering her life after graduation. These folks understood the importance of Alana's preferred tasks as we looked to her future!

Champions, cheerleaders and believers spread far beyond traditional IEP members, and they will become ever more important as the youth in transition graduates and their IEP team dissolves. When designing meaningful work experiences, the champions of the champions also play a vital role!



Alana and her Aunt Christy (my best friend of 27 years). Christy is Alana's cheerleader, but she's also my biggest cheerleader, too!!



More of a "rock" than a cheerleader, Alana's Dad, Sal, supports us both "behind the scenes."



Alana's brother spring 2013 at Special Olympics.



Alana's great-grandmother is again a cheerleader for us both.

# The Advocacy Relay!



Over the course of an individual's life, the primary torch bearer will often change, and that's OK!! We all need a yak to have our back at times.

In the comic strip above, I identify with the octopus. I have always cared for and loved Alana deeply, but sometimes I've needed to pass the torch to a therapist, teacher, family member or in-home caregiver.



Alana and her sisters in May 2018 at the I-94 rest stop near Hysham. We made these signs to cheer on the folks of Rosebud County Sheriff's Office as they biked, walked and ran the Special Olympics torch through our segment of the 2,200-mile relay.

When pulling a transitions "team" together, seek out the torch carriers of the past as well! Alana's early intervention occupational therapist (who now lives retired in Florida), was just tickled to enlist her dogs as "treat taste testers." Cheerleaders and believers are important whether they live near or far!!



In Special Olympics, the torch is called "The Flame of Hope." This links to the comic strip of the octopus and yak, because HOPE is a necessary component of advocacy!

# So, what about the skeptics and perceived barriers?

Some may even wonder...

Why fix what isn't broken?

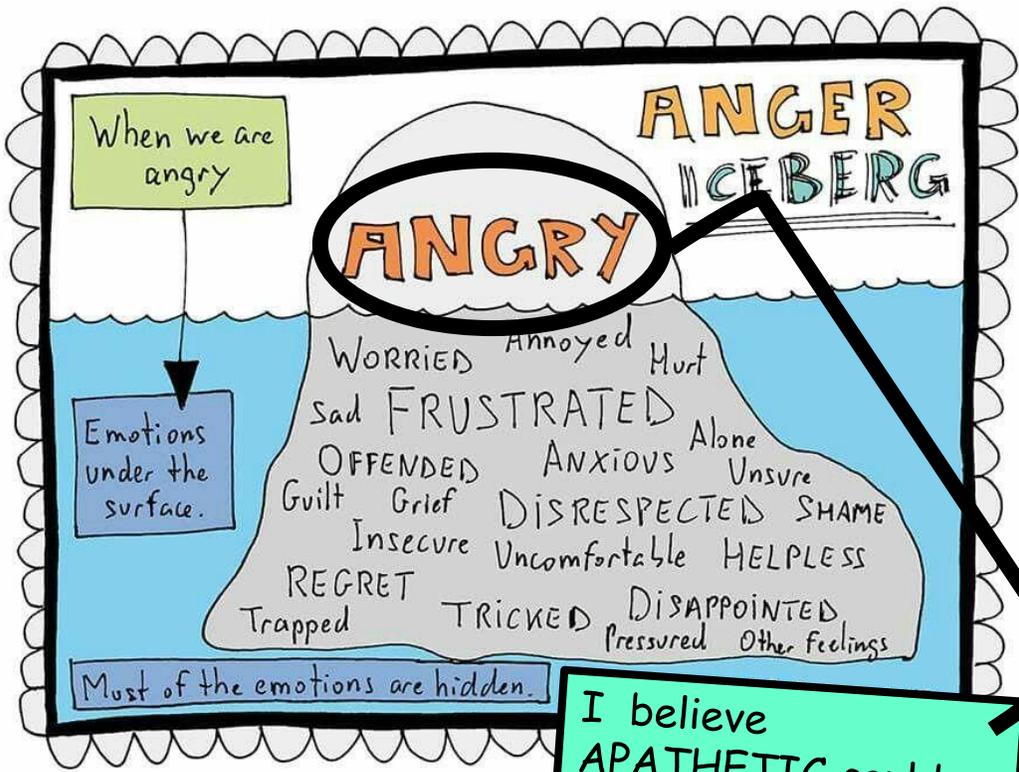


- Lack of Funding?
- Staffing Shortages?
- Safety Concerns?
- Scheduling Conflicts?
- Obligation to meet the needs of all students with limited resources?
- Overall readiness of an individual with a significant impact of disability to seek work experiences outside a classroom setting?
- Creation of Unsustainable Precedents?
- Displays of Socially Inappropriate Behaviors?
- Transportation Issues?
- Liability Concerns?

Welcoming a **GROWTH MINDSET**, these are simply challenges we haven't figured out, **YET!**



Thoughts to consider when family members seem reluctant to participate in meaningful transition planning...



I believe **APATHETIC** could replace angry in the above diagram when thinking of families that seem disengaged from the transitions process.

Establishing a non-judgmental relationship with families may open the door to candid conversations about what needs are (or aren't) being met. If a family's needs in the bottom 3-tiers aren't being met, then dreaming about a bright future for their child with a significant impact of disability may be very difficult!

# MASLOW'S HEIRARCHY of NEEDS



Embracing obstacles is part of the journey!

Success



what people think  
it looks like

Success



what it really  
looks like

Parenting Alana has been filled with mountains and valleys. And, over the past 20 years I've recognized a pattern... Frustration, sadness, disgust, anger, and despair are not "negative" emotions. These emotions (kept in check) are catalysts for positive change.

Here are some insights I've gathered along the way...

Sometimes, even well-meaning folks will make comments that sting. Show grace as you stand your ground.

Understand that for some individuals, seeing is believing, so they may join the team later. Leave the door open.

Despite an advocate's greatest efforts, some people will not fully understand the scope of support an individual with a significant impact of disability requires or why the effort is worth it. Sometimes people simply don't understand what they don't understand. Educating hearts and minds takes time. Emotional energy is valuable, and worth conserving. Sometimes it's best to kindly press on, but this doesn't mean you've given up.



It sounds nice, but it's not possible for someone to walk a mile in my shoes (or Alana's). However, those who choose to walk beside us are a treasure!

We have our team. We have a list of talents, strengths and interests that have been developed into vocational tasks. Now, how do we find OPPORTUNITY for our youth in transition outside of the classroom?

#1 Enlist the power of RELATIONSHIPS.  
Relationships lead to OPPORTUNITY!

"CONNECTION"

The more complex the network is, the more complex its pattern of interconnections, the more resilient it will be.

Fritjof Capra

quote fancy

How just one RELATIONSHIP impacted the success of "Alana's Dog Treats" and the fulfillment of her "Life Goal!"

2006- Met the Children's Librarians at Billings Public Library.

2017- Attended Billings Public Library's "Puppy Party" for their READ dogs and shared treats.

2017- Introduced to READ dog "Oliver" and his handler who is also the executive director of Dog Tag Buddies (DTB).

2017- Connected with many DTB Veteran and service dog teams through the donation of "training treats."

2020- Participated in the service project, "My Vets Friends" by baking dog treats to fill backpacks and made a new friend!

2020- Met with documentary cinematographer, director and producer to film our story!

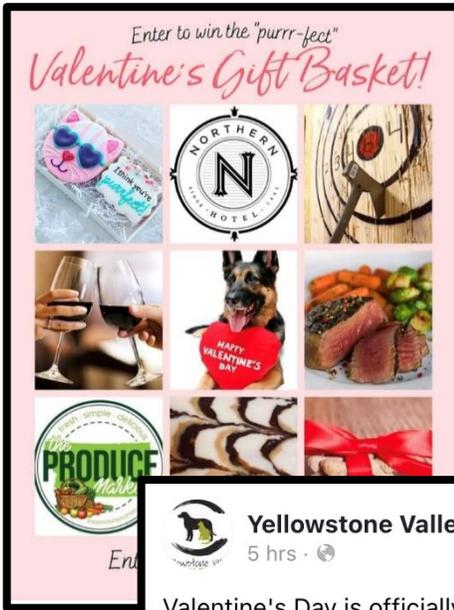
2020- Continued to support "My Vets Friends" by baking dog treats to fill service dogs' Christmas stockings.

2021- Regularly filled dog treat orders for customers touched by our involvement with "My Vets Friends."

2020- Recognized for supporting DTB and "My Vets Friends" at a ceremony attended by many. Signed "The Pledge of Allegiance."

To be continued...

We have been donating pet treats, volunteering and fostering kittens for Yellowstone Valley Animal Shelter (YVAS) for 4 years. YVAS values our support, and they recently gave us a "shout out" on Facebook. When a respected community organization tags us, it gives us instant credibility to literally THOUSANDS of potential customers and possible connections!



Here are more examples of how relationships can lead to opportunity...

**Yellowstone Valley Animal Shelter** • 5 hrs •

Valentine's Day is officially one week from today and we've got the purr-fect gift for your sweetheart. Our Valentine's-themed gift basket has the best collection of local goodies and experiences - believe us, you don't want to miss on these items:

- One night's stay at the Northern Hotel.
- A date night of ax throwing at Ox Indoor Ax Throwing
- Local, grass-fed beef steaks and fresh produce from The Produce Market; fresh-baked bread from Brey's Bakery; plus pasta and freshly-made fudge from Liberty & Vine Country Store for a stay-at-home date night.
- Wine, adorable home décor, a cat lover's puzzle, and an echo dot from Buy the Big Sky- Mikayla Kovash.
- Purr-fect Valentine's sugar cookies
- & last but not least, we've got pet toys and homemade treats from Alana - A Jill of All Trades for your furry Valentines.

Enter to win now until 11:59 PM on Tuesday, February 9th. Our winner will be announced on Wednesday, February 10th. Entries can be purchased, virtually (<https://yvas.org/product/purrfect-valentines-gift-basket/>) or in-person at the shelter, for \$10 each or five tickets for \$40.



In May 2017, we saw opportunity in our relationship with (then) Yellowstone Valley Brewing Company, and we set-up a table of dog treats at their "Yellowstone Valley Gives" event for YVAS. A year later, we signed up for YVAS volunteer orientation, and our faces (and treats) were remembered! I truly believe YVAS initially brought us in as volunteers because of this event and because of the validation the brewery gave us by hosting our table.

**Yellowstone Valley Animal Shelter**  
Animal Shelter

Learn More

Kati, Tammy, Meagan and 15,090 others like this

Home Posts Videos Photos Community

**15,093** Total Likes | **15,633** Total Follows



**Rosebud County Sheriff's Office**  
This evening Alana kindly delivered us some doggie treats for our doggie inmates. She makes these in Hysham. Thank you so much Alana! We're sure the dogs will love them!!!



Alana's virtual connections not only lead to opportunity, but they lead to REAL connections that matter when it REALLY MATTERS!

The "Special Olympics Torch Run" connection to our sheriff's office inspired us to share dog treats. (Stray dogs are kenneled at the sheriff's office as we don't have a dedicated animal shelter in town.) This "shout out" from December 2017 also gave us credibility and name recognition to their thousands of Facebook page followers.



Last month, I was driving Alana and her 6-year-old sister, Cecelia, and we had a serious accident. Fortunately, we walked away with just minor cuts, bumps and bruises, but we were all very shaken up. Cecelia and Alana were both crying unconsolably. I had Cecelia in my arms when the first responders arrived, but Alana needed attention, too. Alana finally stopped crying when Sheriff Fulton (in the top left photo) started asking her, "Alana, are you still making your dog treats?" He was able to comfort her and assess if the accident had impacted her level of consciousness by visiting with her about dog treats and her Special Olympics activities.

#2 Be PRESENT.  
Presence leads to OPPORTUNITY!

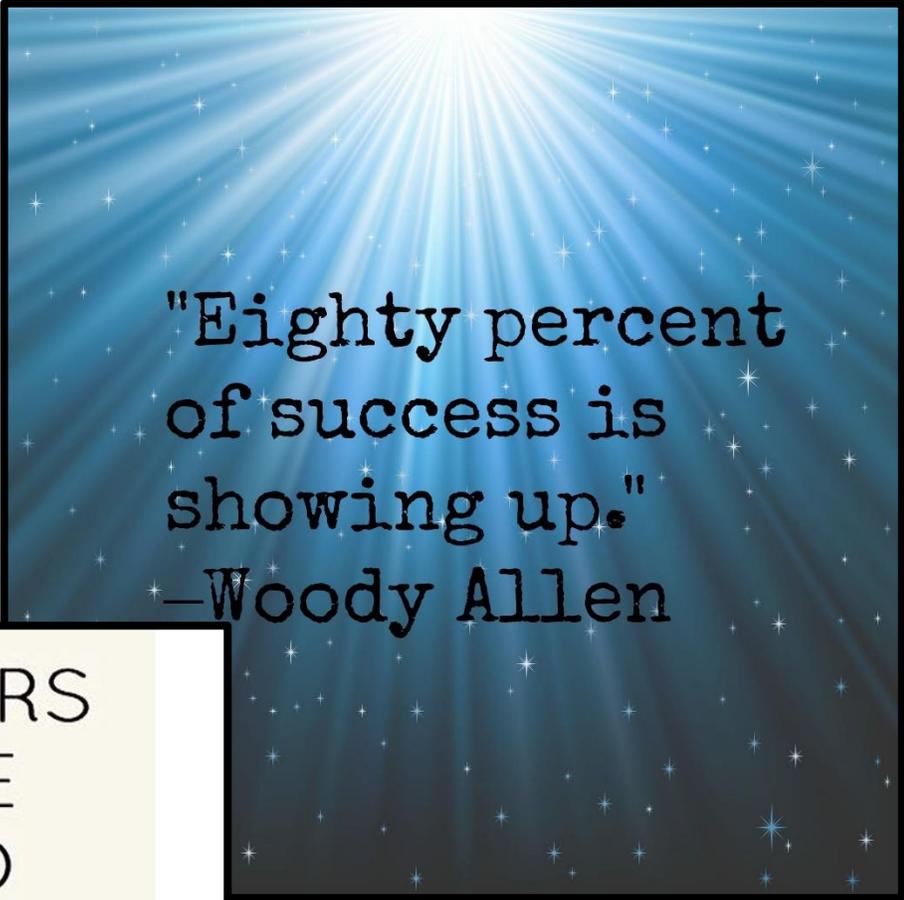


Just show up and  
things will happen.

Mother Teresa

quoteancy

THE DOORS  
WILL BE  
OPENED  
TO THOSE  
WHO ARE  
BOLD  
ENOUGH  
TO KNOCK.



"Eighty percent  
of success is  
showing up."  
—Woody Allen

We have found opportunities...

- Scrolling through Facebook
- Listening to the radio
- Flipping through newspapers
- Checking flyers on "community boards"
- Thumbing through different newsletters
- Reading school bulletins
- Driving by business marquee signs
- Visiting with others...

Honestly, opportunities are EVERYWHERE!!



Knowing our bank offered treats for drive through customers with dogs, we baked these up and delivered them with a note on how to order more. We took a chance, and they've been a customer for 4 years and counting!



We've had a longstanding relationship with Yellowstone Valley Animal Shelter, and it all started with a donation of dog treats!



Miles City Farmers' Market Summer 2016



Our first silent auction donation to benefit a local girl battling cancer Fall 2016

These are some more ways we found to be involved in our community just by embracing opportunity! For Alana, these are meaningful work experiences that align with her "Life Goal."



Our "Festival of Trees" entry titled "Tinsel and Treats" to benefit Rosebud Healthcare's Long Term Care Facility. Winter 2019



Stockman Bank in Hysham had a "Scarecrow Auction" to benefit the community pool. We entered "Spot the Skeleton Scarecrow" made from dog treats! It was a stretch... but it was FUN, and it raised a nice chunk of change! Fall 2018



We surprised our County Election's Office with these treats as a thank-you on Election Day. The staff (and their dogs) LOVED them, and we grew our customer base. Fall 2020

#3 Ensure support personnel realize the **POSITIVE ATTITUDE** they bring matters. Positive energy leads to **OPPORTUNITY!**

A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events and outcomes. It is a catalyst and it sparks extraordinary results.

- Wade Boggs

Especially when volunteering at Billings Public Library, we meet new faces. Alana is free to express the joy she feels while shelving DVDs with "happy squeals." I delight in her happiness and so do many others. We "own" our role as volunteers with "Libraries are for Everyone" t-shirts and badges. Our contributions aren't measured in productivity gained, but they are no less vital to the library's mission.

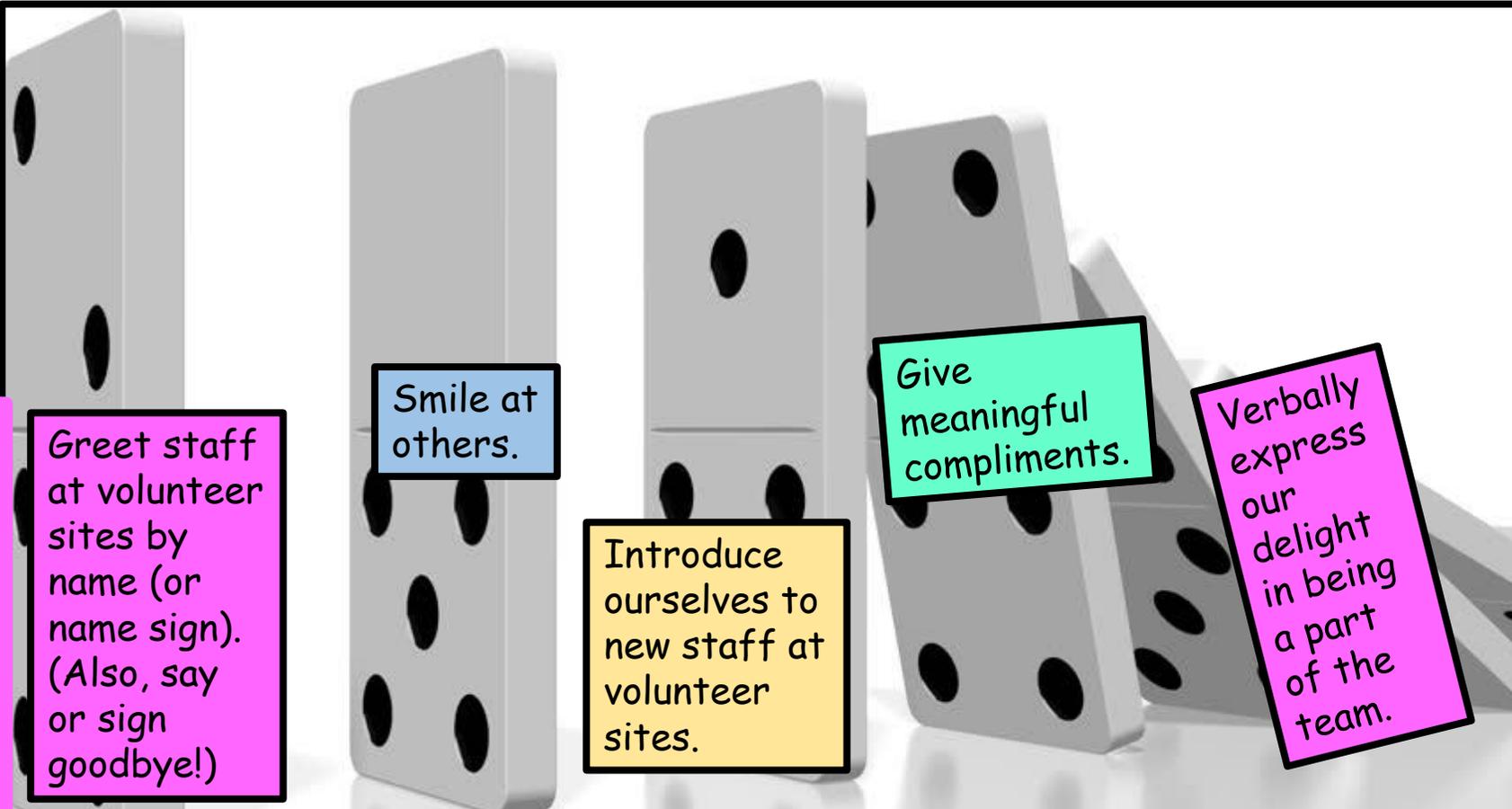


I've realized, I'm teaching others how to interact with Alana through my interactions with her. People are watching me, and I'm helping them to form opinions about individuals with a significant impact of disability. So, I put on the hat of an "Ambassador of Inclusion" when in the community with Alana. If I enjoy Alana's unique company, then others do too. If I am annoyed with Alana's behaviors, then others are too. I do my best not to apologize for Alana being Alana! I also refrain from correcting Alana in front of others. It can be so easy for me to be a broken record of "No, stop, come here!" My positive relationship with Alana opens new positive relationships and opportunities for us both!

These are some more ways we've opened opportunity by being mindful of our positive energy and its impact on others.

“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

*Maya Angelou*



Greet staff at volunteer sites by name (or name sign). (Also, say or sign goodbye!)

Smile at others.

Introduce ourselves to new staff at volunteer sites.

Give meaningful compliments.

Verbally express our delight in being a part of the team.

SMALL THINGS ARE BIG THINGS

If you've tried **eHarmony**, then you're familiar with their relationship "Must Haves" and "Can't Stands" lists. As we took Alana's preferred tasks into community-based work experiences, we too considered the "Must Haves" and "Can't Stands" important to her success!

Must Haves	Can't Stands
Flexible Attendance	Rigid Schedules
Social Connections (Especially High-5s and Hugs)	Inability to Interact in Meaningful Ways
Ability to Freely Communicate	Need to Vocalize in Soft Volumes
Freedom to Walk, Wiggle or even Waltz!	Stationary Workspaces
Sense of Belonging	Feeling like a Stranger

*Change the world by being yourself.*

Alana's gift of AUTHENTICITY is a huge part of what makes her, her!

Why **fit in** when you were born to **stand out**?  
Dr. Seuss



Sometimes, a work experience that "isn't a good fit," just needs some tweaking.



Alana struggled with just hanging-out at farmers' markets. So, we added some carnival style games. (Which she LOVES!) The free games attracted traffic. Handing out prizes (like stickers) gave Alana a means of interaction & purpose. When the market was slow, we played these games together to pass the time.

Back to OPPORTUNITY  
for a moment...



Balancing Alana's meaningful work experiences with the rest of our life is tricky. And that balance doesn't always look the same.

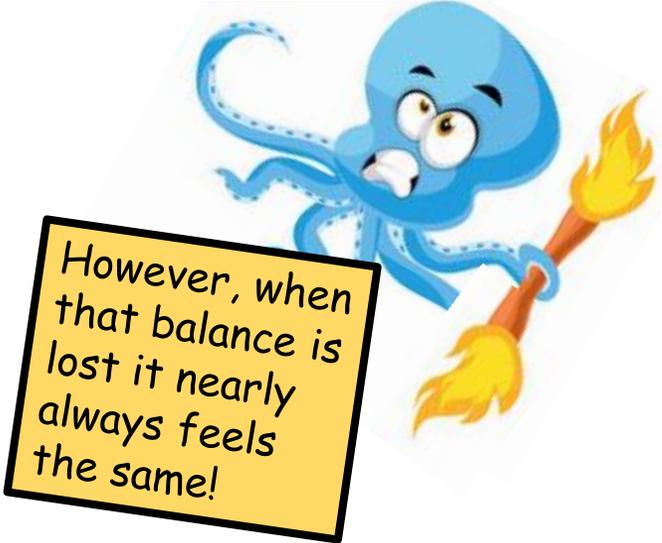


I've found taking on new projects is better if it's SHORT term with a definite end date. Then, we can fulfill our commitments to long term projects, but also keep things fresh without risking burnout.

Setting boundaries of time and energy on new projects also allows us a trial run. Tasks in a community setting may not always match well, and that's OK.

We're always learning from our experiences. This was NOT a good environment for Alana to bake dog treats. Both the seniors and Alana required more attention than I could provide, but we had a standing time slot on their activities calendar!

LESS IS MORE ONLY WHEN MORE IS TOO MUCH  
- FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT



However, when that balance is lost it nearly always feels the same!

Your pet will thank you!!

Make tracks to the Forsyth Senior Center for their new PAWSOME Program!!

Starting June 19<sup>th</sup>- Come bake dog & cat treats with us on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month at 1:00pm!!

A flyer for a 'PAWSOME Program' featuring silhouettes of dogs and cats. The flyer includes the text 'Your pet will thank you!!', 'Make tracks to the Forsyth Senior Center for their new PAWSOME Program!!', and 'Starting June 19<sup>th</sup>- Come bake dog & cat treats with us on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month at 1:00pm!!'. A red circle highlights the date and time information.

To focus our vocational activities, we needed to be intentional in WHAT our products were, WHY they were unique and HOW they impacted our customers.



Our most popular products are intentionally "the cherry on top!" They are one-of-a-kind, but non-essential! Their uniqueness generates customers, but their "cherry on top" nature gives us flexibility in order fill time.

Our eggs are...

-consumable and inexpensive (this allows for repeat customers of all socio-economic groups)

-a rainbow of colors (cream, all shades of brown, white, green, blue and sometimes speckled!)

-FRESH!

-laid by truly free-ranging chickens and ducks, so the variety in diet gives yolks a deep yellow (almost orange) color

-ethically produced by hens with names

-FUN!



Our dog treats are...

-FUN!

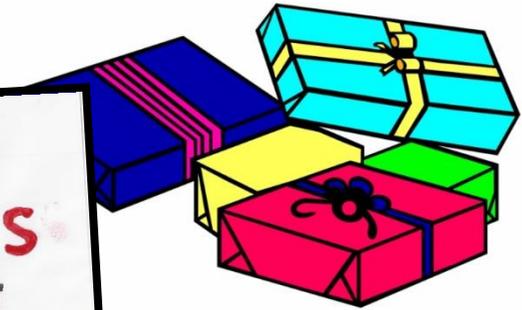
-a variety of recipes, shapes and sizes

-consumable and inexpensive

-baked in a kitchen...not a lab! (familiar ingredients with no preservatives)

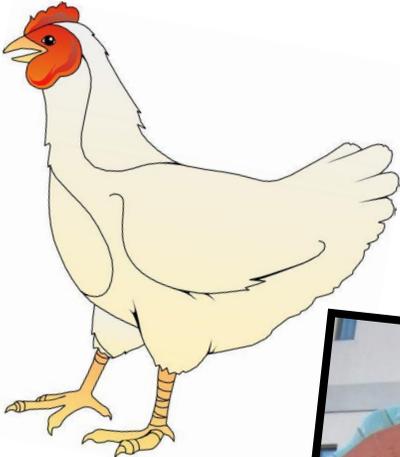
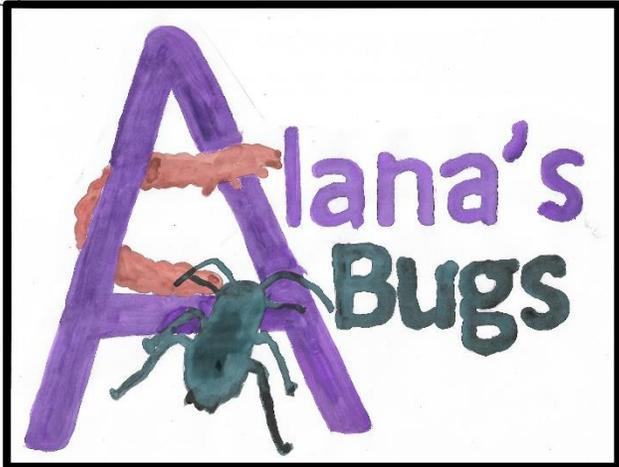
-customizable for different holidays and events ("cookie stamps" allow us to add a pet's name or other short text!)

When a personalized order is delivered, our customers feel like they've been given a GIFT! They feel special, and they're incredibly appreciative! This fuels a relationship, and Alana absolutely delights in connections with people!

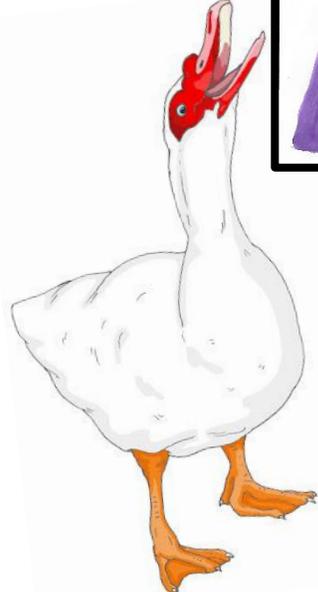
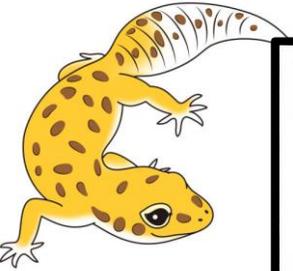


The WHATs, WHYs and HOWs of our products may look different over time, but the changes need to be intentional and continue to align with Alana's "Life Goal!"

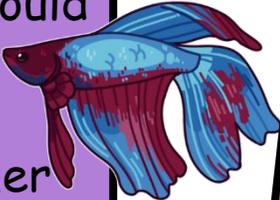
For us, another important consideration was what to do with excess product.



Donating dog treats is an easy way for us to build relationships and avoid waste!



Before starting our feeder insect colonies, we made sure our own critters could enjoy them as well. We have a local customer who feeds them to a gecko, but we feed them to our chickens, ducks and betta fish!



It may look like Alana's delivering treats, but REALLY she's spreading love! 



HOURS	
Monday	Hours: 7:00pm - 7:00pm
Tuesday	Hours: 7:00pm - 7:00pm
Wednesday	CLOSED
Thursday	Hours: 7:00pm - 7:00pm
Friday	Hours: 7:00pm - 7:00pm
Saturday	Hours: 7:00pm - 7:00pm
Sunday	Hours: 7:00pm - 7:00pm



“CONNECTION IS WHY WE'RE HERE; IT IS WHAT GIVES PURPOSE AND MEANING TO OUR LIVES.”

BRENÉ BROWN

People want to be on a team. They want to be part of something bigger than themselves. They want to be in a situation where they feel that they are doing something for the greater good.

Mike Krzyzewski

We designed Alana's meaningful work experiences and built a network of support (business partners, repeat customers and fans) over time by...

1-Starting with a team committed to Alana

2-Using existing relationships to build new connections

3-Making ourselves visible to the community by participating in a variety of events and activities

4-Being aware of the positive energy we contribute

5-Making sure both the environment and the activity are well matched for Alana's talents, strengths and interests

6-Being mindful of balance and taking on new opportunity in a calculated way

7-Truly understanding our products and their impact on customers and their connection to Alana's "Life Goal."

WHAT ABOUT WALDO? Could similar steps lead to meaningful work experiences for him, too?

Waldo is a fictional student from October's webinar...

Waldo is a 16-year-old male in his sophomore year of high school. Waldo has a non-verbal communication style. Waldo's free choice activity is almost always sensory bins containing dry materials (i.e. beans, rice, popcorn seeds, sand, or oatmeal). Waldo enjoys gentle rocking, swinging and bouncing on yoga balls. At home, Waldo sleeps with a weighted blanket in a hammock, and he is seldom without his dog, Rascal.

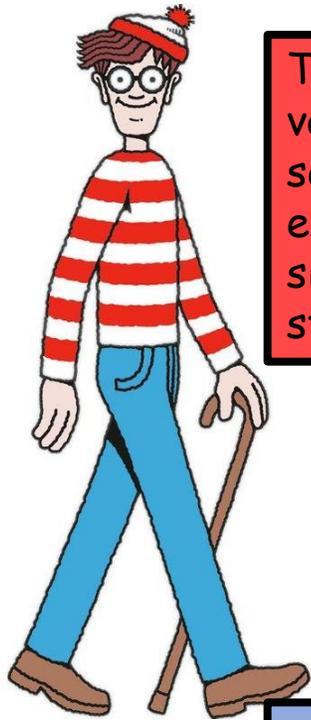


Waldo's team discovered he also had an interest in things that vibrated, and they brainstormed vocational activities that related to this passion.

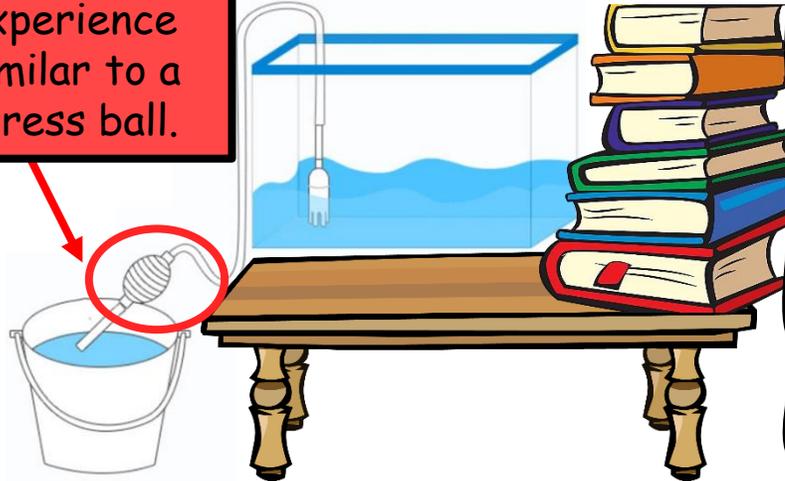
As Waldo's team began to really explore vocational activities connected with vibrations, Waldo's love for the gentle pulses of air and water pumps in fish tanks really took center stage!



With his committed team, Waldo started building upon his experiences and successes...



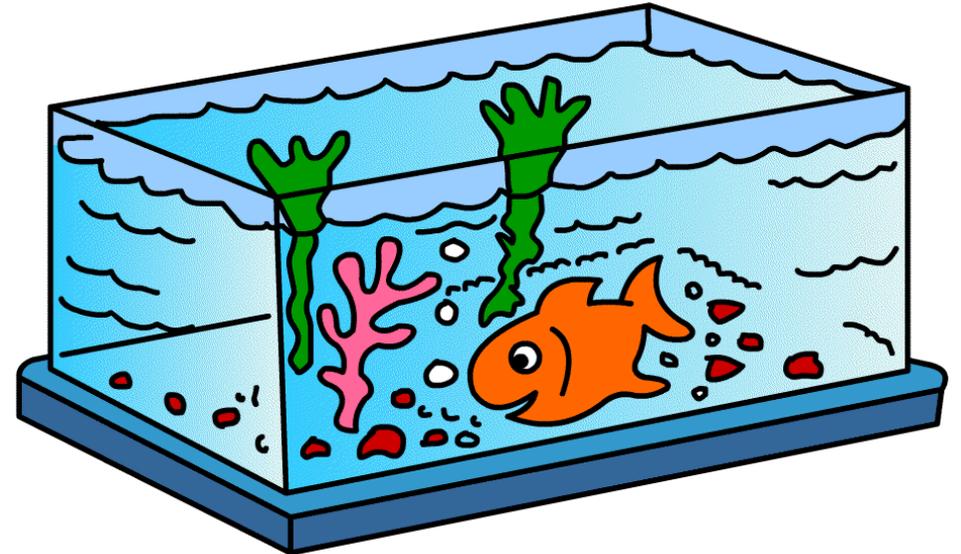
The squeeze valve gives a sensory experience similar to a stress ball.



First, Waldo started maintaining the fish tank in his high school library. There, it was discovered he enjoyed operating the valve to siphon water out.

While at the assisted living facility, Waldo's team recognized another opportunity...

A relationship with the school librarian led Waldo to his first community-based setting to care for a fish tank!

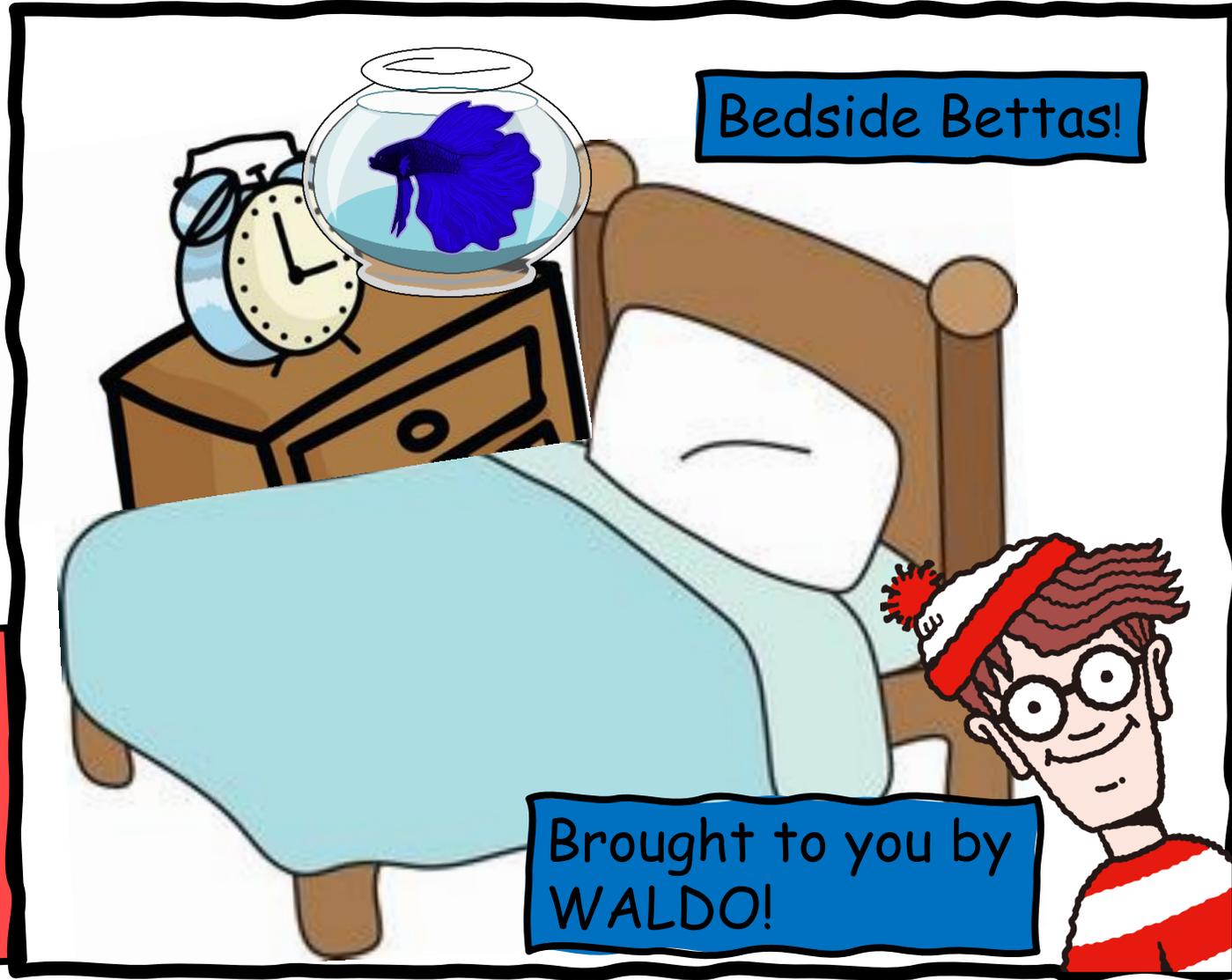


Impressed by Waldo's passion for caring for fish, the librarian mentioned a fish tank at her grandfather's assisted living facility that could benefit from Waldo's TLC. With a positive reference, Waldo started caring for this tank, too!

For a variety of reasons, some residents can't freely enjoy the fish tank in the common area. So, Waldo's team brainstormed the creation of "Bedside Bettas!"



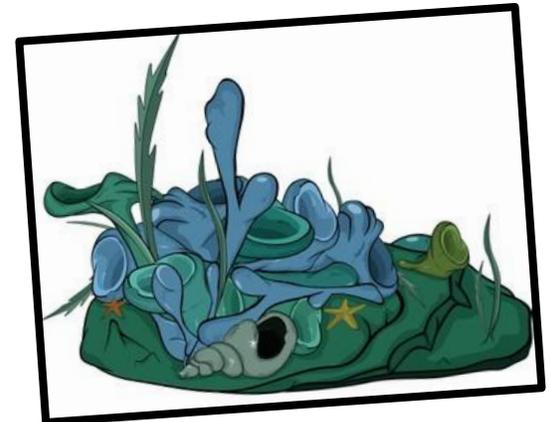
First, Waldo's school had a sale of surplus and unused items. Waldo's team picked up a sturdy computer cart on wheels (that also had a power strip) just perfect for wheeling a 3-gallon fish tank and supplies from room to room.



Next, Waldo's next-door neighbor stumbled upon a functioning 3-gallon fish tank with a heater and water filter at a church's rummage sale!

Then, Waldo and his team sought out a local fish rescue for both networking and to adopt a betta.

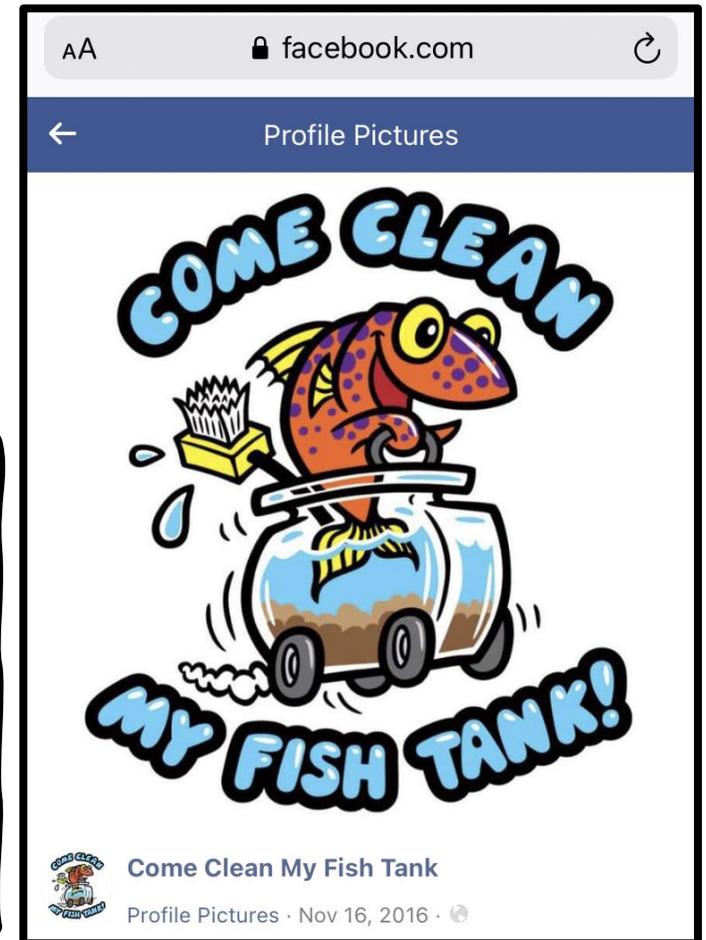
Finally, gravel, tank decorations, a water thermometer and other odds and ends were gathered through donations after the assisted living facility wrote up an article about "Waldo's Bedside Bettas" in their newsletter.



As Waldo entered his senior year of high school, his team started to research what a fish tank maintenance business could look like. Waldo started small with offering "fish sitting" or maintaining tanks and caring for fish on a case-by-case basis as customers (primarily friends and family) took weekend getaways. This allowed Waldo flexibility as he took on new responsibilities. He also advertised his services in the assisted living facility's newsletter as many of the residents' families read the newsletter.

Waldo's team also started "following" a couple Facebook business pages with a focus on (small scale) fish tank care to get new ideas.

Although Waldo's story is fictional, it doesn't have to be! I had a friend in high school, and at 15 years old, he had his own fish tank maintenance business for doctors' offices in Billings!!



Some thoughts, funding sources, support services and agencies that can assist an individual with a significant impact of disability as they develop meaningful work experiences.

#1- Start small and build on successes!



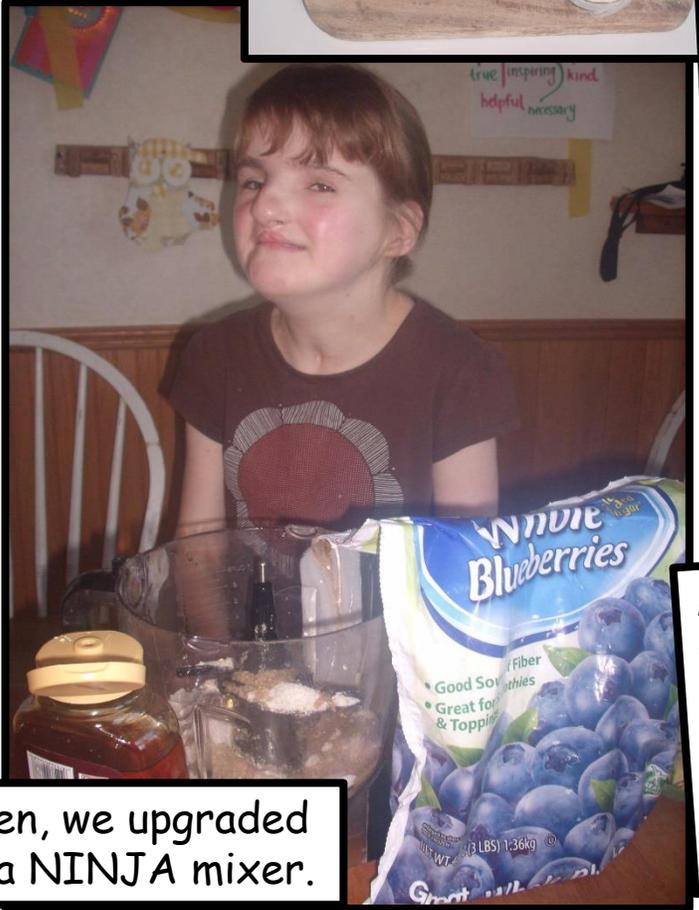
After taste testing with friends' and family's dogs and selling at farmer's markets, Alana and her school aide maintained "on-your-honor" vending boxes around town. Each box held just 6 sandwich baggies of dog treats.



We borrowed a grow light and re-used plastic seedling pots. Thank goodness our only investments were time and a package of tomato and pepper seeds, because garden starts were not "Alana's thing!"



When we first started making pet treats, we used a mixing bowl and spoon.



Then, we upgraded to a NINJA mixer.

And now, we use a 6-quart Kitchen-Aid stand mixer!

#2- Ask about funds ear-marked for special education. Explore programs like Voc-Rehab or Medicaid waivers, but utilize resources with intention.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) funding from Voc-Rehab allowed the school to purchase dog treat ingredients, a KitchenAid mixer, and gave mileage reimbursement (for dog treat deliveries).

After ten years on Montana's Medicaid waiver waitlist, Alana got a funding slot in 2015! So, before COVID-19 (and the subsequent need to maintain social distance), Alana worked with a direct service provider (besides me!) on her vocational ventures at home and in the community. We included vocational goals in her "Personal Support Plan" so these activities were supported through her waiver funds.

Medicaid rules in Montana recently changed, and guardians (and/or parents) can also be paid as personal care assistants (PCAs). So, using the agency "Consumer Direct," we self-direct Alana's PCA hours, and I am her caregiver. This is a funding source separate from her Medicaid waiver.

As Alana neared graduation, we switched from agency based services (DEAP) to "self-directing" her Medicaid waiver cost plan. This switch gave us more flexibility and control over how her funds were used (including the ability to submit reimbursement for travel-or mileage-when volunteering).

Voc-Rehab services at home (separate from school) ignited a curiosity for a business plan and growth, but, for now, we've opted to maintain our hobby business status-by not making more than \$600 a year.

Additionally, our study into MT Medicaid waiver rules revealed that I could be a direct service provider for Alana (once she turned 18) so long as I had no financial connections to her. So, Sal (Alana's Dad) become her sole conservator, but we share guardianship. Both attorneys and the district judge saw the value in my role as her direct service provider. So, this relationship was easily approved in the hearing, and I am her primary direct service provider paid through her Medicaid cost plan.

Navigating these resources was not the easiest for us, but, now that we have them in place, we're VERY thankful!

#3- Share your vision with others!! We were SO surprised by how many folks stepped up to support us, and most times we didn't even ask. Our passion for living Alana's life goal is contagious!



We needed a chest freezer for storing spent grains. A friend stumbled upon this nearly new one at an estate sale for \$30. He picked it up & traded us \$30 in dog treats for it.

Folks enjoy helping in big and small ways, and we welcome the support. It builds our community and fills the giver and receiver with joy! Here are some examples...

-Saving egg cartons for us to re-use.

-Collecting large, plastic, wide-mouth jars with lids for us to fill with dog treats.

-Using special occasions (Alana's birthday, Christmas and graduation) to gift dog treat related supplies.



One of the gals at Dog Tag Buddies was learning a new graphic design computer program, and (to our surprise!) she practiced by creating a new logo for us.



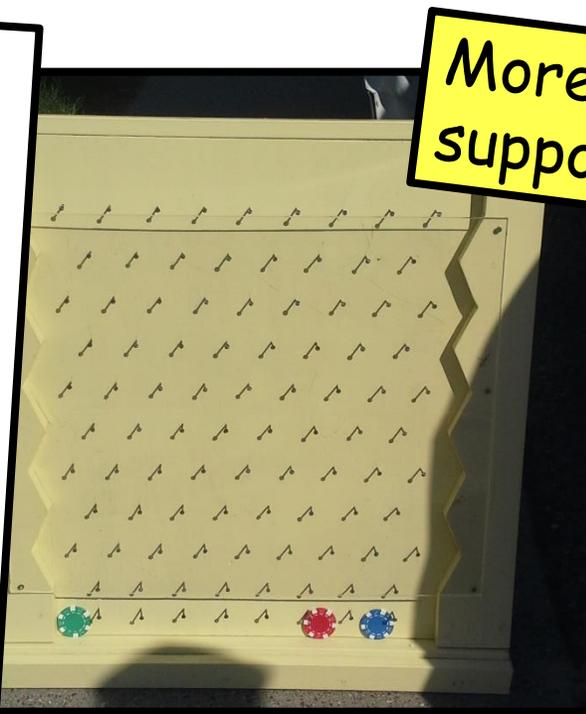
High Plains Brewery, Otium Brewery and Yellowstone Valley Brewing Co. have all donated spent grains (or mash). It's the main ingredient in our most popular dog treat recipe!



For Christmas, Alana got a dog treat maker that works like a waffle iron from her Aunt, Uncle and Cousins!



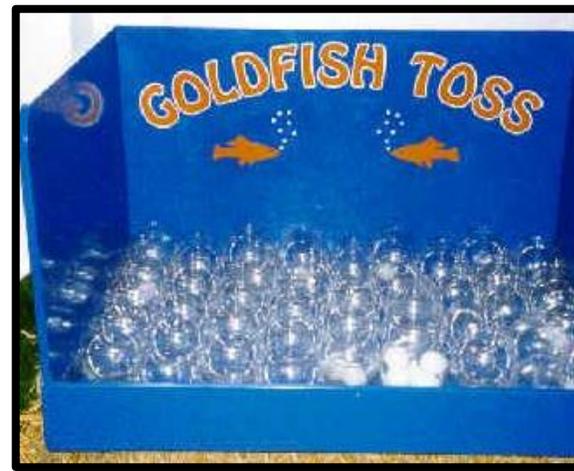
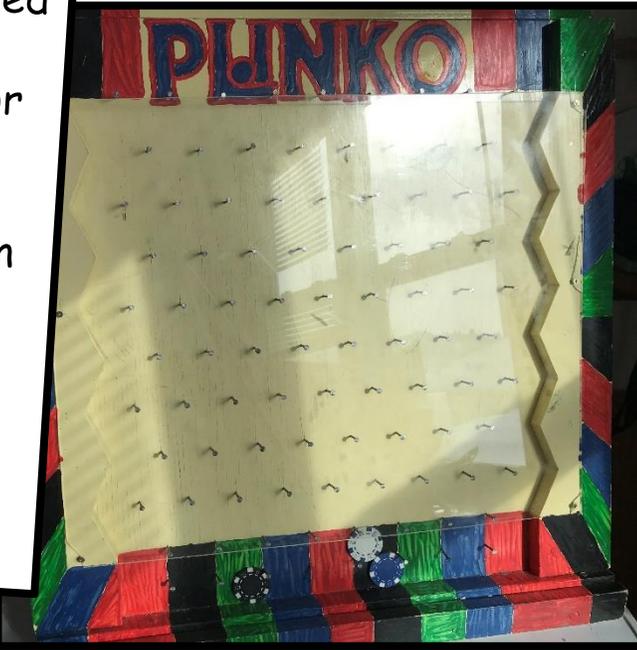
Alana's "Opa" enjoys woodworking, so he was up for the challenge of creating carnival style games for our farmer's market table. His meticulous attention to detail provided perfect nail placement for the poker chips to ricochet down the PLINKO board flawlessly! I added the artistic detail with paint!



More examples of support from others!



"Opa" also used his jigsaw to cut out the dog's mouth for our beanbag toss.



So, what if Waldo's team was looking for some similar carnival style games, but his family didn't have any woodworkers?



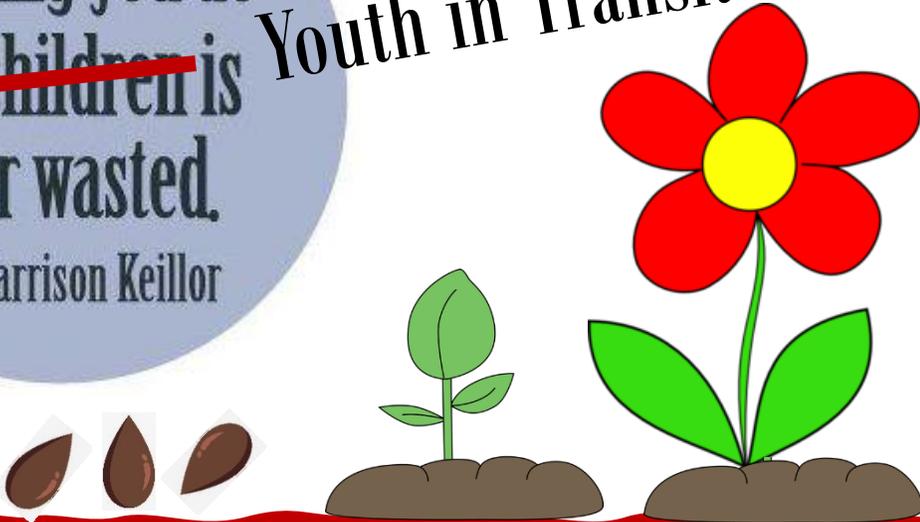
Waldo's team could cast their net a little farther! Maybe one of Waldo's peers in a Voc-Ag class could do the woodwork while an Art class student could do the painting! Or, maybe a peer doing a 4-H woodworking project could offer their skills.



#4- It doesn't have to be perfect to be awesome!

Nothing you do  
for ~~children~~ is  
ever wasted.  
—Garrison Keillor

Youth in Transition



When Alana was in middle school, I thought our family needed to have everything "figured out" by the time Alana hit 18-years old. But that just wasn't true! When I realized her life would no more be set in stone than my life was when I graduated high school, I felt the freedom to ride the wave of life. There's a season for everything, and seeds planted with intention may not bloom for years, and that's OK!



Just 3 months after graduation, Alana had major heart surgery in Denver. In the hospital, we were surprised with a care package sent from everyone at the animal shelter, and everything included screamed "Alana!" Even when we couldn't volunteer, this connection brought her joy at an important time!



Were thinking about you!  
Happy Halloween.  
Alana & Kim! We miss seeing you & hope you are staying healthy!

The "Prison PAWS" program at Montana Women's Prison has been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so we haven't been able to donate treats. However, we got a surprise card in the mail from them! Another connection that brought Alana joy during a difficult time!

One last point that was pivotal to Alana's transition from high school...

School had been a HUGE part of Alana's life since she was 3-years old. Alana thrives on routine, and not going to school was going to be a major change for her. Her Dad (also the school music teacher) and her three younger siblings would still be going to school each morning. It was important for Alana to understand that she would not be going to school after graduation. So, to better prepare her, Alana's last IEP shortened her school week to Monday-Wednesday. Instead of going to school on Thursdays with her Dad and siblings, Alana and I went to work in Billings! Thursdays we volunteered at the animal shelter, public library and community dining room (Montana Rescue Mission). We also made dog treat and egg deliveries. Alana had 9 months of Thursdays during her senior year to adjust to what life after graduation would be like. When school started in the fall of 2019, Alana was able to help send her Dad and siblings off to school with a cheerful wave from the front porch!

Questions? Thoughts? Did we miss anything?... Please reach out to us! [alana.a.jill.of.all.trades@gmail.com](mailto:alana.a.jill.of.all.trades@gmail.com)  
406.697.2083  
Facebook "Alana - A Jill of All Trades"