



A Quarterly Newsletter Produced by the Rural Institute Transition Projects

Special Edition: Emerging Leader Showcase II






**Mentoring in Action
The Emerging Leader
Showcase**
Ellen Condon, Transition Projects Director and
Kim Brown, Transition Projects Coordinator

The Transition and Employment Projects at The University of Montana Rural Institute is committed to developing and disseminating information that improves the post-school outcomes for youth with developmental disabilities. Our activities focus on inclusive education, employment, housing and recreation, especially for young people with significant ongoing support needs.

In order to help transition-age youth and their parents, teachers, and service providers create a rich, exciting vision of what is possible, we developed the Emerging Leader Showcase. Emerging Leaders are young Montanans with developmental disabilities who live, learn, work and/or play in their communities alongside same-aged peers without disabilities. By sharing their stories of where they are now, how they got there, who helped them, and how they overcame obstacles to success, these leaders serve as mentors to others. They provide not only ideas and inspiration, they offer practical suggestions about how to achieve the goals one has set for him/herself.

We continue to recruit Emerging Leaders willing to share their stories. We especially want to hear about youth and families who are self-directing their supports and creatively blending resources. If you want to nominate an Emerging Leader, please download the nomination form from our web site at <http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/EmergingLeaders.asp>. You may also contact Connie Lewis at cjlewis@ruralinstitute.umt.edu or by phone (1-800-732-0323) for the form.

Our 2010 Emerging Leaders are a diverse and amazing group - we hope you enjoy meeting and learning from them in the Emerging Leader Showcase!



Resources

University of Montana's Rural Institute Transition Projects:
<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/>

Online Transition Toolbox:
Information on agencies, services and resources that schools, youth and families might need to access as they plan for life after high school. The materials and information can be printed, copied and shared with students and families as part of their curriculum or in preparation for Transition discussions at IEP meetings
<http://transition-toolbox.pluk.org>

Contact Information:

Ellen Condon
condon@ruralinstitute.umt.edu
Kim Brown
brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu
Connie Lewis
cjlewis@ruralinstitute.umt.edu
Jillian Jurica
jjurica@ruralinstitute.umt.edu

The Rural Institute
700 SW Higgins, Suite 250
Missoula, MT 59803

(406) 243-5467
(800) 732-0323 Toll Free
(406) 243-4730 Fax

EMERGING LEADER SHOWCASE



Josh



**Interviewed by
Kim Brown**



Homeowner. Wage-earner. Athlete. All-around great guy. These terms and more can be used to describe Josh, a 2007 graduate of Capital High School in Helena, Montana, who was nominated as an Emerging Leader by Heidi Foreman, one of his former teachers.

Standing at 6 feet 3 inches tall, Josh makes a big impression wherever he goes. His senior year, he became the first student in special education classes to ever play football at Capital. That season he made a 45-yard field goal and completed ground-shaking tackles. He still loves watching just about any sport (football, basketball, rodeo, volleyball, etc.) and enjoys playing baseball with friends whenever he has the chance. Josh is also an avid fisherman – he likes to drop a line at the Causeway with his buddy Gary when schedules permit.

Josh owns his own home and five acres of land. He lived there with his grandmother until late March 2010, when a family member experienced a medical emergency and needed to move into his house to be closer to loved ones. Josh returned to his parent's home (on land adjoining his own) and is currently living in their basement. Josh's brother, Tyler, also lives there when he isn't away at college in Bozeman.

Clearly his parents (Sid, a veterinarian and animal chiropractor, and Janet, a middle school teacher) taught Josh the importance of hard work at an early age. He juggles three jobs and is a valued employee at all three. On Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 7:30-4:30, Josh can be found at Murdoch's Ranch and Home Supply where he stocks and straightens merchandise, sweeps, and hauls purchases for customers. Josh started at Murdoch's while he was still in high school. Initially it was an

unpaid short-term work experience to give him exposure to the job tasks and work place and to learn more about his strengths and support needs. Josh enjoyed the duties and the setting, so when his work experience ended, he applied for a paid position and was hired.

If you attend a high school basketball, volleyball or track event in Helena, you are likely to see Josh doing crowd control, taking tickets, and answering questions for athletes and spectators. Josh is paid for these duties by the School District #1 Activities Department. He typically works Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays (two or three hours per event) during the sport seasons.

As if that weren't enough, each summer Josh works at all the high school, college and professional rodeo events in the area. He pushes calves out of chutes, returns calves to the pen after roping, runs the tractor, opens the gate for barrel racers, etc. According to an article spotlighting Josh in the November 2009 issue of *Western Horseman* (page 71), Josh is determined to pitch in and do whatever needs to be done. Not only does he excel at the physical aspects of assisting at a rodeo, he is also committed to helping the contestants succeed. He is the first to congratulate them after a ride and to offer suggestions as to how they can

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Josh, cont.

improve the next time out of the chute. With his honesty, compassion, and knowledge of all things rodeo, Josh serves as a role model to many.

Josh also helps his family feed and care for the horses and other livestock on their horse and roping operation. Generally he isn't paid for this...it is an expectation that all family members will chip in. However, his mom will slip Josh some cash if he performs extra duties.

When asked about the supports that help him to live, work and play in his community, Josh quickly points to his parents, brother, grandmother and other relatives, friends, coworkers, rodeo "family," and past teachers (especially Heidi Foreman) and football coaches (especially Reg Hageman) at Capital High. Josh doesn't receive any agency supports (Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, Workforce, etc.). He collected Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments for a period of time, but had to repay the money because his earnings from Murdoch's and School District #1 exceeded the SSI income limit. (If you are an SSI recipient working or considering going to work, contact your local Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Project. Using work incentives like Plans for Achieving Self-Support, you may be able to work and retain your eligibility for important Social Security, Medicaid and other benefits. To locate the WIPA in your area, visit this web site: <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/oesp/providers.nsf/bystate>.)

Because he has his driver's license and owns a car, Josh is able to drive himself anywhere he needs to be. He has a cell phone he can use in case of emergency (and to call friends and family). Josh uses the alarm on his phone to ensure he wakes up in time to get ready for work each morning.

When asked how he's achieved all that he has in his young life, Josh becomes introspective. He says his love for sports and rodeo has helped build a strong network of friends who look out for him. The relationship is reciprocal – he is always happy to help others in any way he can. (People say they can't go into Murdoch's without Josh greeting them and asking them what he can do to assist.) He is passionate about working with his hands and being around people; both are qualities present in all of his work and leisure activities. In terms of what he

needed to learn in order to be successful, Josh says learning to drive, count money, and be respectful were important. He still welcomes the opportunity to learn new things.

No person's life is without its difficulties. For Josh, this includes shaky balance that prevents him from riding at the speed required to compete in rodeo events. He also wishes he had more time to hang out with people his own age and that he could find ways to meet more people and make new friends.

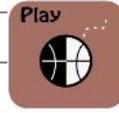
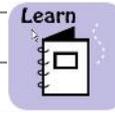
Josh's goals include eventually moving back into his house and living on his own; keeping his job at Murdoch's; working even more and saving money; and meeting new people.

He has advice for other young adults planning what their lives after high school will look like: Get involved. Don't sit at home and be a couch potato. Stay busy! Rent a house. Fill out job applications. Take action to realize your dreams. And for their parents, teachers, and others, Josh says, "Always believe that people are better than they seem. My parents and coaches treat me like any other person. I know what it feels like when people do not."





Ian
by



Kirsten and Brian Marsh

Ian is a seventeen-year-old young man who lives in Missoula, Montana. He is a funny, joyful, and thoughtful young man who lives with the disability of autism. For Ian, autism goes relatively unnoticed and is just part of the natural rhythm of his life and expression.

This fall, Ian will be entering into his junior year at Big Sky High School. Peers with and without disabilities have truly enveloped him into the student community. He enjoys watching Girls Soccer, participating in Special Olympics Basketball and Swimming, and will be in two mainstream classes – Culinary Arts 2 and Yearbook as a roving photographer. Ian will also be working off-campus as part of his education through the Vocational Education program at Big Sky, drawing from existing skills and developing new interests and marketable talents. He also enjoys his Life Skill classes (Math, English, Science and PE), which enable him to focus on specific areas of development, working at his own pace, supported by peer tutors and para-educators.

Ian enjoys engaging in his community and is a true asset to the community. He has volunteered at our local Food Bank for close to a year. Initially, Ian went to the Food Bank with a job coach who worked on developing a task list, teaching and modeling skills, proper socialization with co-workers and self-regulating his own expression. He has now fully transitioned into this activity, choosing to engage with helping others, 100% independently - leaving home, walking to the facility, working off a written task list and interacting with employees and other volunteers in the process. Ian also attends church with his family and runs PowerPoint during the 11:00 worship service independently.

Ian has many interests that keep him involved and invested in his community. His Youth Group at church is an awesome community with whom he loves learning and serving, going on retreats, ski trips, canoe adventures and camping. Music is another passion in his life. Ian enjoys playing the piano and listening to a wide range of music. He also enjoys attending live performances. A highlight for him was seeing two of his favorite bands play live – Genesis and U2. He also enjoys bowling, hiking, swimming, watching movies, working on the computer, going out to dinner and ice cream with friends, and playing basketball. Ian especially loves the ocean, boogie boarding whenever his family goes on vacation.

Ian is very helpful in the home. He lives with his parents and younger brother Trevor (age 14). He helps with laundry, cooking, setting the table, and cleaning, and he does a great job keeping his room tidy. He has great friends who love and support him. Although he has never expressed it, I believe that Ian would like to live independently one day, staying close by and well connected with his family and friends.



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Training Calendar

We currently do not have any new web conferences scheduled. All previous sessions have been archived to our web site. The audio-recordings, PowerPoint slideshows and handouts are available at:

<http://ruralinstitute.umn.edu/transition/trainingcalend.asp>

We value your opinion. To provide feedback to us about this newsletter and our other products, please take our quick online survey at:
<http://www.surveymzmo.com/s/58441/transition-projects-feedback>

Ian, cont.

In two years, Ian will be graduating from high school and transitioning into the next phase of his life. As a family, we are already working with Ian on household safety when he is home alone. He also does well working off a schedule and we are being proactive in having Ian identify activities that he both enjoys and are beneficial to him. College is a possibility that would allow Ian to continue exploring interests and develop passions in the process. But initially our hope is that Ian will continue to volunteer and work outside the home for at least 20 hours a week, continuing to grow and develop his vocational and interpersonal skills.

As Ian's parents, our greatest hopes for him as he grows into adulthood are a strong faith in Christ (confident of his purpose in his journey of life and faith), a growing sense that he has something of great value to offer others, and a continuing desire to be motivated to invest himself in others. It is such a privilege to watch Ian grow, seeing the lasting imprint that he leaves on the hearts of people, and for us to grow in compassion and understanding in the process.

Kirsten and Brian Marsh (exceedingly proud and grateful parents)



Molly & Keough
Interviewed by
Ellen Condon

Live  Play  Work 



Keough (left) and Molly (right)

Are you a high school student wondering if you are going to live with your parents forever? Are you a parent of a child with a developmental disability wondering the same thing? Many times young adults who have ongoing support needs may get the message that until they can do everything on their own, from paying their bills to cooking three-course meals, they don't have the skills to live on their own.

Molly and Keough are a great example of two young people living in their own apartment in Missoula. There are things they like or need to have help with, paying the bills for example, but that doesn't mean that they are not ready to live in their own apartment.

Molly is 23 and Keough 29 years old. They got to know each other through participating in the same activities at the YMCA and moved into their apartment on June 13, 2009. Their apartment is located within walking distance of the University of Montana, near Keough's church, and within walking distance to each of their parents' homes. Both young women are quite familiar with the neighborhood and the bus routes within the neighborhood. Keough's dad heard about the apartment through a friend of his and one thing led to another.

Both roommates spend some time each week at their parents' homes with their families. Molly likes to visit her cat Sooky and check on her family's home when they are out of town. Both girls do their laundry at home weekly.

Keough receives some support through Developmental Disabilities services. She uses her support person to help her shop for groceries one day a week and sometimes to help her cook using the stove on a different day. Molly received supports initially to find and learn her job through Vocational Rehabilitation and Opportunity Resources, a local employment vendor. Now her family and friends at work help her when she needs it. Both of the girls' families oversee their finances, pay their bills, and help them manage their spending money.

Both Molly and Keough said that they make most of their meals in the microwave and that they like to

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Molly and Keough, cont.

eat out. One of the benefits of living so close to the University is that there are some good food options there! Molly and Keough talked about limiting their eating out to save money and stay healthy. They want to stockpile food in their apartment so they have lots of choices for eating at home. They trade off on cleaning duties, although both admit that Keough is the neatnik! They have lots of movies that they watch and a computer with Internet access for email and Facebook.

Molly and Keough are active in their communities, participating in choir, YMCA, and voice lessons for Molly. Both young women work but would like to work more hours. Keough works at Goodwill. She worked on campus at the bookstore during busier times which she liked because it paid better. Even though she isn't working there now she passes through to say hello and shop for cards and presents for her family for upcoming occasions.

When asked about dreams for the future, Keough stated that she would like to try college by the time she is 40. She also wants to collect all the playbills from the Missoula Community Theater's productions from 1980 - 2008. She has about half of them currently and Molly shared that Keough memorizes all the lines of all of the plays she sees and collects every musical CD of the plays she has attended. Keough and I talked about her volunteering at MCT and she thought that would be a great idea because it would help her with her project of collecting the playbills. Her more current focus is on getting Netflix because she has a list of films that have won Oscars that she is waiting to see.

Molly works in the laundry at the Holiday Inn. She has been there over a year. Her hours vary from week to week depending on the hotel's business.

Initially she had a job coach at work paid for by Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to help her learn the tasks. When the funding through VR ended, her parents paid privately for job coaching for a few additional months. Now she works on her own. Molly says her coworker Christina is a mentor to her about work and life issues. Molly credits her with advising on healthy eating and exercise, towing the line and downloading music for her iPod.

Molly stated that her voice instructor and also her mom have been instrumental in helping her be who she is today. Molly takes voice lessons on Tuesdays. Her boyfriend Barclay gave her voice lessons as a present and she continues to go weekly.

Molly's dream is to someday live with her boyfriend whom she has dated since high school and live in a place that allows pets. Molly also wants to capture the story of her life in writing, music and dance. (Molly recently presented at the May 28, 2010 "Dating and Healthy Relationships" webinar designed by youth for youth. Visit <http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/trainingcalend.asp> to listen to the recording if you missed it live.)



Molly with her coworker

Save the Date

2010 Youth in Transition Conference

October 3-5, 2010

Helena, Montana

Red Lion Colonial Inn

The 2010 Youth in Transition Conference is a youth- and parent-centered event that will assist youth with disabilities and their teams to develop plans for after high school. For further details and registration information, please visit:

www.montanayouthtransitions.org



JOHN

Interviewed by Kim Brown



Eureka, Montana is a remote rural community of just over 1000 people located less than ten miles from the Canadian border. John and his family moved here 25 years ago; John graduated from Lincoln County High School in 1995. The individuals who

nominated him as an Emerging Leader raved about John's contributions to the community and about his ability to connect with people around the world using the common language of golf.

The Early Years

John was born 33 years ago with Cornelia de Lange Syndrome. According to the description posted on his Facebook page, this is "a congenital condition that causes developmental delays, mild to severe intellectual disabilities, limb abnormalities, excessive hair growth and distinctive facial features." In addition, John is nearly blind in one eye, has poor depth perception, and has limited mobility in his wrists. He's never let this slow him down, though. When John was only eight years old, he was already involved with gymnastics, bowling, and the softball throw through Special Olympics.

John's family has known its share of heartache. His father, Steve, is a Vietnam vet with disabilities that require multiple surgeries. Steve and Juana (John's mother) lost their baby daughter to a heart defect. And in 1993, John's older brother, Michael, died in a car accident. He was only 20 years old.

It Started with a Dream

Michael had been a talented high school athlete and John idolized him. One day shortly after his brother's death, John went into Michael's room, grabbed his golf clubs, took them outside and started to swing at balls in the yard. That was the beginning of a passion that would take John across the U.S. and overseas to Europe, and would afford him the opportunity to rub shoulders with the brightest stars in business and sports.

John practiced with Michael's clubs every day. Steve took him to local golf courses, but other golfers became impatient when he had to take extra strokes. On one especially hurtful occasion, fellow golfers actually had the course marshal come and rush John along. Steve vowed that this would never happen again. He and John would build their own golf course out of the deep woods surrounding their home.

One Green at a Time

The family started by planting one green. Then two neighbors suggested Steve take out some trees and add a fairway. A family friend volunteered his bulldozer to clear the trees and do the contouring and shaping. When this work was completed, Steve and John decided they needed another green and another...and so it continued. John and his buddies designed the greens, and family friends helped construct tees, clear brush and timber, install irrigation lines, and do all the other tasks necessary to realize John and Steve's dream. What Steve and John consider to be the best green was developed with the help of a professional, Fred Ward from United Golf and Irrigation, who listened to John describe his vision and then designed it. Today the ten-acre course boasts nine holes on a ten-hole layout (one green is used more than once). The longest hole is 320 yards and the shortest is 143.

But an operational golf course needs a lot more than greens and fairways. Steve contacted courses, course superintendents and golf professionals around the country seeking donations of equipment and supplies, and the response was overwhelming. Offers of mowers, grass seed, golf balls, irrigation equipment (the family used to drag sprinklers around the course to keep it green), advice, time, labor, and everything else imaginable flowed in. When the donated items were too big to ship, Steve hopped into his car and drove to pick them up. He racked up thousands of miles traveling from course to course collecting donations. Corporate America also jumped in to assist - Club Car donated five golf carts, Trojan Batteries donated batteries for the golf carts, and John Deere donated a tractor. Altogether Steve estimates that more than \$100,000 worth of equipment and materials were generously given to build John's course.

The course will never be "finished." Even now, John and Steve are planning three new greens that should be ready sometime in 2010.

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John, cont.

A Diamond in the Rough

And so, John's Golf Course was born. It is open to the public all day every day in the spring and summer. Everyone is welcome, including people who are often discouraged from playing at public courses (people with disabilities, seniors, and families with kids). Golfers can play at any pace without fear of being hassled or rushed. According to the course web site, "John is available to play when he is not on a tournament." He thoroughly enjoys introducing new golfers to the sport about which he is so passionate. He especially appreciates that the golf course offers him the chance to meet people from around the world.

John's Golf Course offers single rider golf cars and specially designed seated golf clubs that can be used from the golf carts. There is even a course dog who will find and retrieve lost balls. Best of all, everything is free. That's right, there are no greens fees, no club rental fees, and no charges to use a golf cart. (Donations for upkeep are always welcome, though.) The course generates no income and has no operating budget; John and Steve are the only "staff."

John and his golf course have been profiled in a number of local, state and national publications including *Montana Golf*, *Golf Course Management*, *People*, *Delta Magazine*, *Golf Course Superintendent Magazine*, *AAA Travel Magazine*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Club Car Industry News*. He has also shared his story on HBO, ESPN, and *The Today Show*.

Mixing Work and Pleasure

To keep his course in top condition, John mows three times per week using his riding lawnmower. He also rakes, picks up pinecones, and cuts the holes. John welcomes people to the course (usually 5-6 golfers, including 1-2 families, each day), shows them around the holes, and will even golf with them if they want.

Steve says, "When John isn't mowing, he's playing. He plays golf all day every day."



John's Golf Course hosts an annual tournament that raises money to send John on golf trips. This is the only time anyone pays to play the course. John and Steve offer tee prizes for every entrant (professional hats, shirts and jackets donated by businesses and dealers) and putting contest or hole prizes (gift certificates for restaurants or golf passes to area courses).

The family runs a monthly "tamale fundraiser" to help support the golf course. Steve and Juana cook 80-100 dozen tamales and then John and his parents sell them on the street corner. John seizes the opportunity to meet and visit with customers and to learn and practice business skills like taking orders and making change.

Because John is nationally known across the golf course industry, he is regularly invited to travel and play. He has attended the Masters Golf Tournaments in Augusta, Georgia, twice, with companies sponsoring him both times. The sponsors put him up in a mansion and gave him tickets and VIP passes to the Masters. He has been invited to the U.S. Open and has been golfing at the exclusive and private L.A. Country Club. Each year, John attends golf course national conventions hosted by Bear Environmental Sciences and is given exclusive housing and VIP passes. John met Tony Stewart in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and has met numerous other celebrities (like Terry Bradshaw) who continue to keep in touch with him. He travels the country extensively, though not as much in the last two years because both he and his dad underwent numerous surgeries that kept them close to home.

Irish Eyes are Smiling

John has even had the opportunity to travel abroad. In 2005, the community raised enough money to send John to the World Special Olympics in Dublin, Ireland. He finished third in golf. Even more memorable, he was allowed to bring home two of the 20-by-4-foot green Special Olympics banners displayed at the

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John, cont.

closing ceremonies. There were over 1000 athlete signatures on each banner! John donated one of the banners to Special Olympics Montana for their auction.

Is There More to Life Than Golf?

After a long day at the golf course, John heads to his trailer where his Maltese poodle, Thumper, greets him. (John and Thumper have their own place right on the golf course property.) He likes to sit down and relax, sometimes grabbing a cold beer and visiting on his cell phone, landline phone, or Facebook. John's parents also live on the property, making it easy for Steve to check in on John once a week.

John also likes to spend time with his friends. His pal Andy (the brother of one of John's former teachers) moved to California quite a few years ago and now John makes an annual pilgrimage to visit him. He saves money all year and then in the early summer, Steve drives John to Bakersfield to see Andy. (Steve stays in Los Angeles.) Andy shows John how to do things like laundry and housecleaning, they go to movies together, they go out to eat (John takes turns buying), they drink a few beers, and they just generally hang out. John says Andy has become almost a big brother to him.

Some years, Steve is unable to drive John to Bakersfield so John flies instead. He takes Allegiant Airlines to Las Vegas, where Andy meets him for the drive back to Bakersfield. When Steve takes John to the airport for his flight, he introduces his son to an airline attendant who will walk with him to the gate. If necessary, the attendant can drive John to connecting gates on one of the terminal carts. John wears an identification tag to help airline personnel recognize him and assist him as needed. Juana and Steve taught John to ask airline attendants or police if he ever needs help, and he also has his cell phone in case of emergency. Instead of carrying large amounts of cash with him on trips, John takes a preloaded debit card with \$100 or so on it and then just a bit of pocket change. With all these safety pieces in place, John's parents feel very comfortable with him traveling on his own.

"With a Little Help from My Friends..."

John receives a monthly SSI check, which his dad uses to pay John's bills. John uses part of his SSI to buy food at Costco during his monthly shopping trips with his dad. John's medical costs are covered by Medicaid. He doesn't receive any other assistance or services.

John knows how to drive but hasn't taken the driver's licensing exam and doesn't have a car. He regularly drives golf carts, tractors, go-carts, mowers and work carts, though.



Life Lessons from Golf

For John, learning to play golf well and to run his own course has led to a multitude of other important life lessons. Over the years, he's had to learn respect for other golfers; self-control; patience; the value of practice, practice, practice; how to listen to the advice of golf superintendents and friends in the golf course industry; how to mingle with celebrities and other "important people" at dinners and golf tournaments (he once golfed on the team of the Shopko CEO at a Special Olympics fundraiser in Madison, Wisconsin...the other team members paid \$25,000 per person to play!); how to speak to audiences of over 2000 people; how to properly meet people from around the country and around the world...golf has enriched John's life beyond anything he or his family could have

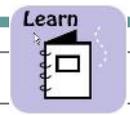
imagined when he first picked up his brother's clubs all those years ago. It has offered him a place to excel, a place where his gifts can shine through. It has helped him feel closer to Michael. It has brought healing to the entire family.

For more information, visit the "John's Golf Course" web page: <http://www.johnsgolfcourse.org>.



Brady

Interviewed by
Kim Brown



“You don’t know if I’ll get hurt or not. You at least need to let me try.” Brady, an 18-year-old high school senior in Miles City, Montana, leads a life packed with work, school, scouting, sports, volunteer activities, and the typical fun pursuits of any other

young adult. But he still finds time to eloquently advocate for himself and other people with disabilities, and to battle against what he calls the “prejudice of low expectations.” Brady explains that too often, society assumes people with disabilities can’t or shouldn’t do certain things...and so they aren’t even allowed to try. Yet it is by trying new things and making mistakes that we all learn. Brady encourages others not to let a fear of mistakes stop them. And he practices what he preaches – he is always willing to have new experiences and to try something once.

Brady lives with his aunt, Sharon, and their dog Turbo in this rural eastern Montana community. Every fall and winter, he is paid to run the clock for the school volleyball and basketball games. This summer, he applied for the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth Employment Program through Action for Eastern Montana. Sharon and Brady spent a couple of hours completing the WIA application and gathering the necessary documentation (birth certificate, Social Security number, IEP, etc.). Brady also needed to complete some testing. Once the application and testing were finished, he was quickly approved for the program. They helped him find a job at Miles Community College as a maintenance assistant, authorized \$200 for him to spend at Walmart on work clothing (non-slip shoes, work gloves, etc.), and are paying his wages of \$7.25 per hour throughout the summer. (Brady and his Action for Eastern Montana staff are currently negotiating for him to do something similar during the school year.) Brady works from 2:00-10:00 PM Monday through Friday.

Brady’s responsibilities at MCC include: emptying the garbage, gathering and separating the recycling, checking supplies, wiping tables, cleaning whiteboards, learning how to use the buffer,

using the polisher, cleaning bathrooms, shampooing the new carpets, and “other duties as assigned.” He generally works with a supervisor but is sometimes on his own. According to Sharon, if Brady knows how to do something, he will take the initiative to do it. For example, when he starts his shift, he immediately collects and sorts the recycling without being asked. This willingness to jump in and do what needs to be done is part of why Brady’s supervisor is pushing for him to continue with MCC after summer ends. When asked how he feels about his job, Brady says he “kind of likes it” because it “gives me work experience and is fun.” He admits that he likes the paychecks, too. (He didn’t even want to take time off for vacation or Scout camp because he didn’t want to miss any work.)

Brady is active in the Boy Scout program and is currently working on his Life Advancement Scout status with the local troop (next is Star Scout and then the highest level, Eagle Scout). To do this, he had to receive an accommodation from the state organization that would allow him to continue working toward Eagle Scout beyond age 18 (because of the impact of his disability, he won’t have an age limit for achieving Eagle Scout). As he’s earned his badges over the years, Brady has requested and received very few accommodations from the Boy Scouts. (To qualify for the swim badge, for example, he gave a speech about swimming since he is physically unable to swim.)

Brady competes in bowling and track and field events at Special Olympics each year. He is also part of MCC’s Relay for Life team and works to raise money for that organization. For fun, he studies judo, plays computer games, watches television (especially the Home Shopping Network), rides his bike (he doesn’t have a driver’s license so rides everywhere on his three-wheeled bike), goes to movies or bowling with friends...Sharon says Brady is always busy.

This young man has established lofty goals for himself. He plans to live independently in a house or mansion, either in Miles City or another Montana town. He plans to travel to Europe to visit his ancestors in Ireland and Germany, and is already saving money for the trip. Eventually he plans to start his own business (he hasn’t decided what type of business yet). As Brady explains, “I like to set my goals really high so I can work hard on them and achieve them.”

To realize his dream of self-employment, after graduation Brady will attend MCC and earn a two-year accounting certificate. (He will qualify for a tuition waiver since Sharon works for the

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Brady, cont.

college.) Brady credits Mrs. Harvey, his high school accounting and business math teacher, for educating him about accounting fundamentals, taxes, and other important business concepts. He will rely on his aptitude for (and love of) math, as well as his strong sales skills to make his business a success. (Brady has extensive sales experience for his young age – he has led his Boy Scout troop in popcorn sales for many years and even has regular customers who call him every year to place an order, and he has sold Relay for Life quilt raffle tickets, Special Olympics truck raffle tickets, and apples for Key Club.)

To help prepare for college, Sharon encouraged Brady to take three two-week summer sessions of a reading and writing class at MCC. He attended classes Monday through Friday from 1:00-3:00 to support and increase his current reading and writing levels. (The class was offered for students through sixth grade but an exception was granted to allow Brady to participate.)

Brady accesses a number of supports (like the WIA Youth Employment Program through Action for Eastern Montana) to help him be successful. For example, he receives speech and physical therapies through the school district; Sharon drives him places, mentors him to save money, and teaches him life skills (laundry, cooking, house cleaning, yard work, etc.); and he just enrolled with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). VR is monitoring Brady's education plan and will provide more support once he is in college. VR referred him to AWARE for independent living services but there is a long waiting list. Finally, Brady receives Social Security Survivor's benefits (his mother passed away when he was young). Sharon is concerned that it will be challenging to find the additional assistance Brady will need as he enters college and moves into his own place.

Rest assured that Brady will be a powerful and tireless voice in advocating for his own needs and those of others with disabilities. He already has a long history of doing so. Each year, he runs for Student Council on a campaign of inclusion for all in every high school activity. He has been elected once on this platform. After a new track was installed at the college, one of Brady's classmates who uses a wheelchair was told he could

not take his chair on the track. This would have meant that Relay for Life participants who are cancer survivors and who might use wheelchairs would also be prevented from taking their "survivors' lap" around the track. He wrote a letter to the editor in support of allowing everyone to use the new track. As Brady succinctly describes the core issue in all his advocacy efforts, "All people need to be treated with respect. I want everyone to be treated the right way. What goes around comes around. When people don't treat you with respect, it hurts real bad."

Brady knows about being "hurt real bad." He had to leave one school because of physical assaults and has been on the receiving end of vicious bullying for years. Through the experience, Brady has learned to speak up for himself. To those who are cruel to people with disabilities, he cautions, "Everyone has a disability - you probably just don't know it yet. Kids used to pick on me for having glasses and now those same kids have glasses themselves. None of us knows how our life will unfold." At one point, the bullying became so severe (even including a death threat) that Sharon and Brady contacted the



police to press charges. Because the harassment was happening over the phone, Verizon was subpoenaed for the phone records and the bullies were identified. One was charged and the others issued letters of warning. The harassment stopped immediately. Sharon explains that initially, the attitude was "these are kids being kids. We can't do anything about it." "And sometimes there is apathy about certain crimes and victims." By Sharon and Brady seeing the case through to the end, local officials learned how to successfully prosecute similar crimes (and hopefully young people heard the message that such behavior would no longer be tolerated).

Sharon and Brady urge anyone who is being bullied to talk to a counselor, law enforcement officer, or even a judge. "Don't go through this by yourself. Bullying tends to isolate and make people feel like victims. There is no reason to go through this by yourself. Find more and more and more people to be on your side."

Brady also encourages young people to "achieve your goals. Don't let your disability hold you back or ruin your life. Get out in the community. Get

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Brady, cont.

out and do everything you want and can, regardless of your disability. Fight for your freedom and your rights.” He adds that it never hurts to have “too many” friends and a good sense of humor.

Sharon marvels at Brady and his incredible work ethic. She says homework takes him longer, but he puts in the hard work to do it and he rarely asks for accommodations or modifications. He had perfect school attendance his freshman year even

with all his health issues and set a goal to have perfect attendance every year...just to prove to the school that people with disabilities can do it. As a youngster, Brady was given a poor prognosis but Sharon kept raising the bar. “He’ll tell us when he’s through...and he’s never told us. It’s okay to refuse advice you’re given if it puts limits on what you want to do.”



Mathalia

Work 

Learn 

Interviewed by **Ellen Condon**

Play 



Mathalia just finished her freshman year at Big Sky High School, but that is just the beginning of this year’s accomplishments. She began volunteering as an usher at Missoula Children’s Theater where she also acts in plays and enjoys attending plays. She

also began a volunteer position at the Public Library sorting the books before another volunteer shelves them. She competed as a member of the Loyola-Big Sky High School swim team and continued to take violin lessons, practicing on her own and participating in recitals around Missoula. And on her 16th birthday, she presented as an Emerging Leader at the Council for Exceptional Children annual conference to teachers, families, and professionals. (An Emerging Leader is a young adult who experiences a developmental disability but lives, learns, plays, and/or works in her community.) She shared her story and accomplishments by reading the script that accompanied a slideshow her brother helped her put together.

In addition to having two new work experiences to help prepare her for life after high school, Mathalia increased how independently she navigates her day. She now walks to the University pool to attend swim practice, and rides the city bus with increasing independence to the theater, outdoor pool and to the library. Each morning she wakes up to an alarm that

she sets on her iPod touch (she chose the cricket sound). She uses a timer to show her how much time she has to finish her routine of getting washed up, dressing, having breakfast, cleaning up the kitchen, packing her lunch and getting out the door to catch the bus for school. Her mom can now do her own exercise routine in the morning, since Mathalia has her routine down.

Mathalia strives to keep up with her two older siblings who play the violin, swim competitively and enjoy theater. Mathalia started violin in first grade, played in the orchestra in the fifth grade, learned to swim when she was in third grade, and began acting in plays when she was in elementary school. At age four, when her brother and sister lost interest in making pot holders, she took over their looms. She now sells pot holders in four Missoula venues: Rockin Rudy’s, Great Harvest, The Good Food Store and Butterfly Herbs.

Mathalia keeps organized by using lists of what she has to do each day. At the end of the day, she journals about her activities. She also likes to keep track of what songs she practices each day on her violin and which yoga poses she practices on charts that she creates herself in a notebook.



Mathalia and her family want to see her enjoying an active full life in the community after she graduates from high school. This would include a paid job, continuing to swim at the master’s level, volunteering in her community, continuing with

(Continued on page 13)

Mathalia, cont.

her music and activities and getting around the community when and where she wants to.

The challenge for young adults with ongoing support needs to participate in a quality life after high school is the fact that in many states including Montana there is a wait list for services. Even though Mathalia has been determined eligible for services as an adult with Developmental Disabilities, she will have to wait until there is availability of these services to receive long-term help. By striving to be as independent, skilled and connected into her

community as possible while she has school and family supports, she is well on her way to building a busy and challenging future for herself.

Where will Mathalia be at age 21? Will she own her own home? Will she be married? Will she be attending classes at the University of Montana? Will she own the same business or have started a new business? Who knows what the future holds for Mathalia? For now she is a stellar role model for other young adults with disabilities.



Zac

Interviewed by **Kim Brown**

Live Work

Play



When Zac turned 18, he told his mom, Kim, that he wanted to live on his own. Within six months of graduating in June 2009, Zac made his dream come true. On New Year's Day, he moved into an apartment in the Helena Queen City Estates – ASI (Accessible Space, Inc.) complex.

Zac chose Queen City because he had friends living there so he had seen the apartments and liked them. The building is also within walking distance of the places Zac likes to eat and spend his time, an important consideration since he doesn't drive. The 26 units are for individuals with low incomes who have disabilities or are at least 62 years of age. Rental amounts are based on the individual's or household's monthly income. Zac completed an application for one of the apartments, assuming he'd be on a waiting list for years. He was thrilled (and his mother stunned) when he learned he could move in right away.

Kim was comforted by the fact that the building is "secure," meaning visitors need to be buzzed in and out. There is also a maintenance manager on premises Monday through Friday from 8:00 until 12:00. Most of the residents have paid support staff to assist them, but Zac does not. When he needs something (like when he locks himself out), he calls his mom. (He has both a cell phone and a land line.)

Zac is responsible for keeping his apartment clean, though his mom will help as needed. He has funding from the Montana Independent Living Project for 13 hours of assistance per week with laundry and meal preparation. Kim says this doesn't cover the amount of help he actually needs. Initially Zac's sister filled in the support gaps, but once she went to work Zac's mom took over.

Kim also handles Zac's financial affairs. She is the payee for his Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Zac generally receives the full Federal Benefit Rate, but when he's working, his pay slightly affects his check. (Readers should refer to the Rural Institute Social Security Work Incentives fact sheets posted on our web site at <http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/training/publications.asp> for more information about the impact of wages on benefits.) To facilitate bill paying, Kim set up auto-pay (payments are directly taken from Zac's bank account each month) for rent, electricity, phone and cable. Water and heat are included in his rent.

Kim has been and continues to be the primary support person in Zac's life. He has a Developmental Disabilities Case Manager, but due to frequent staff turnover they don't even know his current case

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Zac, cont.

manager's name and they don't use the service. Zac was referred to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) during his senior year of high school. Because they were concerned about waiting lists, his family hurried to complete the application paperwork. To their surprise, he was found eligible for VR services and picked up right away. He was only 17 at the time. His VR Counselor wanted him to quickly find a job; Zac's family wanted to wait until he turned 18 so his VR case was closed. (While waiting lists are a painful reality for many or even most young adults with disabilities, Kim says Zac has always been able to access services soon after applying.)

Like most young adults his age, Zac exists primarily on fast foods. He microwaves things at home (he learned the hard way not to put metal pots in the microwave), cooks pizzas in his oven, and walks to Taco Bell, Dairy Queen, or Subway.

Zac works part-time for the Capital High School Activities Department during the football and basketball seasons. He is the Football and Field Manager, responsible for setting up and taking down the field and yard markers, and the Basketball Ball Manager for the boys and girls teams. (Zac started at the Ball Manager position while he was still in school.)

He also volunteers a couple of times each month at the Working for God Thrift Store across the street from his apartment. He walked into the store one day and asked if he could help them out – now he sorts and hangs up merchandise. In the next few months, Zac will start assisting a local resident to socialize horses as another activity.

When he's not working, volunteering, or helping others, Zac might walk to K-Mart (a couple of blocks away) to hang out and shop. Almost every day, he walks the mile or so to the YMCA. He spends hours lifting weights, swimming, and playing basketball with "the old guys." He also likes to text and call friends on his cell phone and to email and follow sports schedules and scores on the computer at his parents' house. Zac is learning sign language from a friend who wears two hearing aids (Zac has been deaf in his left ear since age six).

And his newest hobby is public speaking. His mom says he'll talk "indefinitely" unless he's given time limits! This flair for oration probably came from his participation in the Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF) last summer. He attended at the suggestion of his teacher, Heidi Foreman, and enjoyed it so much he might volunteer to help with future MYLF sessions. He and several peers presented about MYLF at the October 2009 Montana Association of Rehabilitation/Youth Transitions Conference.

For a young man who was born in Texas, lived there until 15 or 16, and moved to Montana hating snow and cold, Zac has embraced the outdoor lifestyle of this

Rocky Mountain state. Though he won't walk to the YMCA if he peers out the window and it's cloudy or looks nasty, he does snowboard; canoe; ride horses and golf with Eagle Mount; fish with family and friends (Zac practices "catch and release" and says his dad practices "eat and release"); and participate on an Independent Adult Special Olympics team (his sports are basketball, track, and golf). Zac is very interested in rodeo (he loves horses) and attends local events with family members or on his own. He knows several contestants and rodeo hands from school, so they let him visit the "behind-the-scenes" areas like the chutes. In

keeping with the rodeo theme, Zac enjoys listening to country music. Although he's adjusted well to life in the north, Zac still looks forward to the annual family vacation to the Longhorn State.

Ladies are another passion of Zac's. He is polite and respectful...a "good catch"! He switches girlfriends frequently, but eventually wants a lasting relationship, marriage, and kids.

Zac's mom doesn't worry about him traveling his community on foot. Kim is confident that Zac wouldn't ride in a car with strangers and he has an excellent sense of direction. In addition, he generally calls ahead of time to let her know where he's headed. Zac's parents can also give him rides if needed. (Helena has a public transit system but Kim and Zac don't find it user-friendly. Patrons need to call ahead for a scheduled pick-up time or they need to be going somewhere along the bus line's regular route.) Kim believes that some parents handicap their children with disabilities by overprotecting

(Continued on page 15)



Zac, cont.

them. Instead, Zac's family has always pushed him. When he was little and learning to walk, he would often fall. Other people would run to help, but Zac's family would just tell him to get up and try again. They also taught him that he can do anything he wants, though he may have to find different resources or routes. For example, Zac wanted to try out for football. His mom was terrified. Together they spoke to the coach and team manager and agreed that sports management might be a better fit while still allowing Zac to be part of the team.

Each parent knows their child's limits and capabilities. In school, Kim had to tell his teachers to push Zac past his comfort zone so he could learn and grow. She admitted she herself had to let go and back off more in his senior year so he could become an independent adult. She believes parents need to let their kids make choices, set them up to succeed when possible, listen to them, be there to support them, and not avoid the tough issues and questions. To her relief, Zac still often consults and confides in her. Kim misses having Zac at home and recognizes that it sometimes creates extra work for her to provide the supports he needs in his apartment. She says it's common for parents to become depressed, stressed and exhausted as they help their young adult offspring transition into adulthood. But Kim is proud of all that Zac has achieved and excited that he is living the life he wants to live. She feels blessed to be his mom.

When asked what he likes most about living on his own, Zac said the ability to walk places by himself and to not be scared of anything. His goals include keeping his apartment and becoming a cowboy (he wants to start saddle bronc and bareback riding, even though his mom is afraid for him).

Zac's advice to other young adults planning for their lives after high school includes:

- Wait for the right time.
- Let God open your heart.
- Look to God for help and He'll make your decision.
- Learn from those of us who have already made the transition. Learn from what we're going through. Contact me and ask me questions.

Zac's mom says many professionals have told her that Zac is the reason they keep doing what they do. His kindness, optimism, willingness to work hard, and zest for life make him a true Montana Emerging Leader.

(Update: Zac moved back to Texas in the summer of 2010. We send our best wishes to him – may he continue achieve his goals and realize his dreams.)

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**The Rural Institute:
Center for Excellence in Disability
Education, Research, and Service
700 SW Higgins, Suite 250
Missoula, MT 59803
Telephone: (406) 243-5467
TT: (406) 243-4200
Toll Free: (800) 732-0323
Fax: (406) 243-4730**

<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition>



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