

Is College Realistic?

By Stanley D. Klein, Ph.D.

Stanley D. Klein, Ph.D., answers readers' questions about child development and family life. Dr. Klein is a licensed clinical psychologist and the co-editor of five books including *Reflections from a Different Journey: What Adults with Disabilities Wish All Parents Knew* (McGraw-Hill, 2004) and *You Will Dream New Dreams: Inspiring Personal Stories by Parents of Children with Disabilities* (Kensington, 2001). He is also a frequent speaker at parent and professional conferences.

Question. Our daughter with a developmental disability is in high school. She has benefited from inclusion since kindergarten. Her friends are beginning to make college plans; she wants to go too. Will college ever be realistic for her?

Answer. Some colleges are developing programs that may be realistic. One exciting example is the University of Iowa's R.E.A.C.H. (Realizing Educational And Career Hopes) Program. I asked Dennis C. Harper, Ph.D., Director, to describe the program: "R.E.A.C.H. seeks to create a living-learning experience where young adults with multiple learning and cognitive disabilities are empowered with the skills necessary to become independent, productive, and fully participating adults living and working in the community. A two-year certificate program, R.E.A.C.H. offers classes that emphasize life and social skills for independent living, specific course work in academic enrichment, and career development. Fully integrated

into The University of Iowa college experience, it provides on-campus living in a residence hall fully supported by trained residence assistants as well as career counseling and field placements to help students focus on employment that is meaningful to them and matches their skills."

The R.E.A.C.H. web site (www.education.uiowa.edu/reach) details who the program is for:

- Student is 18-25 years of age at start of program.
- Student has completed or will complete a high school program with a diploma, certificate of completion, or equivalent from a certified secondary school by time of enrollment.
- Student has identified learning problems that interfered with school performance throughout his/her academic career.
- Student has a history of academic, vocational, and social experiences that contribute to the development of independent living skills.
- Student has practical reading, writing, and communication skills consistent with a higher education experience; the student uses computers and other technology.
- Student requires disability related supports and services (academic, vocational, recreational, and residential) which are beyond those typically provided by most University support services.
- Student has evidence of ability to function within and to benefit from a higher education experience.
- Student has sufficient emotional and behavioral stability and mental/physical stamina to participate in all aspects of University life.
- Student can negotiate campus safely during class transitions, meal times, and recreational activities independently and unsupervised (after initial orientation) and has basic safety skills in unsupervised settings.
- Student actively participates in completing the REACH application materials and personal interview process.
- Student evidences a personal desire to complete the curriculum progressing toward a career of choice.
- Student has a family or natural support group who actively support the goals and philosophy of the R.E.A.C.H. Program and the University of Iowa.

The Pathway program at the University of California at Los Angeles Extension (www.uclaextension.edu/pathway) is a similar two-year program. Pathway's web site states that "Pathway's goal is to help young adults with developmental disabilities prepare for independent living and employment by providing individualized support and a high quality educational experience within the UCLA environment. The Program's inclusive living and learning environment provides opportunities for

participants to improve skills for independent living and employment; pursue educational enrichment and growth; and develop friendships and self-confidence.”

I believe that other public and private colleges and universities will follow the

examples of R.E.A.C.H. and Pathway and create similar programs. Then, college programs would become available to young adults with developmental disabilities like your daughter. However, since history teaches us that parents advocating for their

children's special needs have been required for new programs to develop, I am hopeful that more and more parents will advocate for college programs. ■

Donor Profile: *Jim Gardner*

Longtime supporter Jim Gardner and his wife Sally first came to their local chapter of The Arc in Louisiana in 1975 after their daughter, Kelly, had undergone 11 brain surgeries for congenital hydrocephalus. Jim and Sally were seeking infant intervention support services and “we found it at a local Arc program which was fairly new and had both home-based and center-based programs and you could choose what you wanted,” Jim recalled.

Jim became actively involved in advancing the programs of The Arc and assumed leadership positions as President of The Arc of Caddo-Bossier from 1981-1983 and as President of The Arc of Louisiana from 1983-1985. As an advocate for his daughter, his priorities crystallized around services and supports. “I learned very quickly that institutionalized services were the main services offered and it was not something that I was interested in for my daughter or in supporting continuing maintenance for those kinds of services,” he explained.

The Arc of Caddo-Bossier had started as a sheltered workshop and a children's day program. Jim saw “the evolution of community-based services at a time when infant intervention was new [and we] started the first community home and first respite program in the state of Louisiana,” he said. “There may have been other places like Catholic Charities in New Orleans, but not at The Arc. That is where we were expanding programs.”

Jim has been at the law firm of Lunn, Irion, Salley, Carlisle & Gardner for 37 years. This Shreveport, LA based corporate and insurance trial defense firm employed his daughter Kelly, now 34, as “an interoffice runner within the firm...she picked up materials from secretaries to be copied as well as books from the law library.” However, “without formal service delivery with adequate pay and benefits” the work program couldn't be sustained, he said.

“Kelly lives with Sally and me and she is receiving some home support services through two different limited

waiver programs and she is on the waiting list for the full service waiver program where she has been for ten years,” Jim noted.

Jim attended the national convention in Dallas with his son, Jay, (Jr.) and his wife, Kelly. (“I feel like George Foreman with all his kids named George,” Jim quipped.) “I'm trying to get them involved – he's a pediatrician in New Orleans...he was a third year resident when Katrina hit and he was locked up in Children's Hospital for four days until they could evacuate the hospital,” Jim said.

In addition to passing The Arc torch to the next generation, Jim continues to support the efforts of the organization through generous contributions. What would he tell someone who is considering making a donation? “I think it's supporting the number one advocacy organization for parents for cutting edge services and supports,” he said. ■

That provision included in the Pension Protection Act of 2006 allows individuals age 70½ and older to withdraw up to \$100,000 from Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) and Roth IRAs without having the withdrawals treated as taxable income. That provision is set to expire in December. Please remember The Arc when making giving plans from your IRA.