

INSTEP



The biannual Step Out USA, Inc. newsletter for our board, advisory board, members, friends, and patrons

SUMMER/FALL 2011

Stepping in the Right Direction

We are currently conducting our first online surveys: one for Step Out Members and one for parents and professionals. Our goal is to enhance the reach and effectiveness of our programs by capturing input from stakeholders about: 1) current issues facing the adult LD community; 2) the quality and impact of Step Out and 3) untapped resources that might help to advance our cause.

Some of the preliminary survey results are highlighted below.

- 100% of attendees rated Step Out events either “very good” or “excellent.”
- 60% of the responding family members were regular attendees of the Parent/Professional meetings, reinforcing the value of these biannual sessions.
- The anniversary party, holiday party, and monthly social events are favorites among Member-respondents.
- Over 70% of responding Members are employed on a part, or full-time basis.
- Continuing education topics in which Members expressed the most interest included computer

technology, arts & crafts, dating & marriage, organizational skills, and cooking & food preparation.

- Other respondents ranked socialization, recreation, and employment opportunities as being among the most important for adults with learning disabilities.
- Films, concerts and indoor activities were among the most popular recreational options for Members.
- While the majority of respondents get information about Step Out via INSTEP, 66% of Members and 74% of other respondents expressed interest in receiving future editions electronically.

As a volunteer-run organization with limited resources, we were also very pleased to see that several respondents indicated a willingness to play larger roles in the support and/or administration of Step Out.

If you haven't yet participated in our surveys, we would love to hear from you! Simply visit us online at stepoutusa.org and click on the appropriate link. It's easy, secure and only takes a few minutes of your time. All survey responses will be considered when finalizing our 2012 strategic plan and calendar of events.

– Brian Israel, SOU Advisory Board

With respect to the adult LD community in general, please rate the importance of each of the items listed below.

1 = Critical , 2 = Very important , 3 = Moderately important , 4 = Less important						
Answer	1	2	3	4	Number of Responses	Rating Score*
Continuing education for LD adults	[Bar chart showing distribution]				30	1.7
Socialization and recreational opportunities for LD adults	[Bar chart showing distribution]				33	1.3
Employment opportunities for LD adults	[Bar chart showing distribution]				33	1.3
Counseling services for LD adults	[Bar chart showing distribution]				32	1.7
Housing for LD adults	[Bar chart showing distribution]				33	1.8
Financial management / estate planning for families and caregivers	[Bar chart showing distribution]				32	1.8
Education, support and resources for families and caregivers	[Bar chart showing distribution]				32	1.7
Forums for interaction and networking among family members and caregivers	[Bar chart showing distribution]				32	1.8

*The Rating Score is the weighted average calculated by dividing the sum of all weighted ratings by the number of total responses.

Sample result from ongoing Constituent Survey

Step Out Member Living on His Own but Living Alone

Message from our Executive Director, Patricia Coy

Step Out member Dan Minow has been living on his own for almost twenty years. He has had roommates off and on during this time, but never lived in a supervised residential setting with a peer group of other adults with learning disabilities. When Dan recently lost his job of six years, due to corporate outsourcing, he began to realize more than ever that *living on your own* can also mean *living alone*.

During a recent review of the web site, Get Ahead LIVING, I was interested to read the following accounts of college educated young adults living on their own for the first time.

Living away from your family is no cakewalk. If you thought it was, it's time to knock off your rose-tinted glasses and face reality. There are bills to be paid, landlords to deal with, shopping, cooking and cleaning to take care of, work and sometimes school to handle and much more. — John

I didn't quite realize that living alone could be instrumental in building all the discipline you needed in life until I moved out on my own. I thought all I needed to keep alive was some money for food, clothes and shelter. But that wasn't all—by the end of the first month I hardly had any money to purchase even the bare necessities. The second month was even more unequivocally detestable courtesy of unwashed clothes, food that was not nutritious, an apartment that was inundated with dust and dirt, and sky-rocketing expenses. — Melissa

The article then goes on to explain that living alone can turn into a devastating experience if you don't follow these simple rules:

1. Adopt a win-win approach.
2. Plan ahead and expect the unexpected.
3. Observe first, then make a move.
4. Develop a realistic budget and savings plan.
5. Develop and maintain healthy eating and exercise habits.
6. Develop friendships outside of your family and form a mentoring relationship with someone you trust.
7. Make some form of continuing education a part of your life.
8. Participate in group social and cultural activities.
9. Find a hobby.
10. Participate in your community – Volunteer.

It's hard to disagree with the above advice, but how many can truthfully say that all ten of the above rules are followed on a regular basis? As parents of an adult with learning disabilities, how many think that your son or daughter would be able to independently implement

any or all of these suggestions? Every day in my private practice I come in contact with adults with learning disabilities trying to live on their own with little or no professional supports. Fortunately I am also finding that many parents are beginning to realize that they need a residential community that provides the opportunity for their adult children to live on their own without being alone. In response to this need, TranSteps has developed *My Place*, a living concept designed to "ACCESS Independence" for adults with learning disabilities by assisting them to find: **Affordable Communities Convenient to Employment, Socialization and Services.**

Dan and his family are excited that he will be one of the first residents at *My Place Chicago*, located at the Pavilion Apartments. He plans on moving in this Fall and is looking forward to enjoying the indoor and outdoor swimming pools, racquet ball court, and health club as well as participating in group activities and receiving professional supports through an Individualized Life Plan.

If your son or daughter would like to join Dan at *My Place Chicago* or you would like additional information about TranSteps' services including the *My Place* program, please contact Patricia Coy at 847-289-4460.

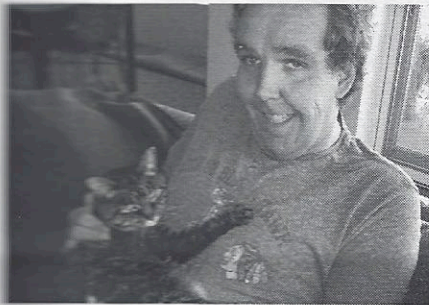
Checklist of Necessities for LD Adults

The following are recommended by Samantha Abeel – writer, poet, teacher and spokeswoman for adults with LD. Samantha is a young woman with a learning disability whose life journey inspires audiences and gives hope to those facing and working to overcome obstacles. As a presenter, she focuses on strategies to cope with school, jobs, social and emotional issues. The following list is her absolute "must have" items to survive with a learning disability:

- Debit/credit card used with discretion
- Tip chart
- Computer with quicken program and spell check
- GPS
- Personal accountant
- Support people – non "toxic" negative people
- Daily planner – don't give up!
Paper Calendar, I Phone, Electronic
- Personal pet: cat or dog
- Treadmill
- Therapist
- Light box for seasonal affect disorder
- Short term goals
- Routine
- Sense of humor

Three Members Share Positive Personal Experiences

Windy Dillingham has established a friendship with actor Warwick Davis on Twitter. She explains: *I had an interesting thing happen Christmas morning. I discovered that Warwick Davis stopped by my Twitter account. He is an actor who was in Star Wars, Willow, Harry Potter, and Narnia Prince Caspian. He has written a book called Life's Too Short: The Extraordinary Life and Career of Warwick Davis. I had mentioned my storm chasing hobby when I sent Email about reading his book and living with a disability. He reached out to me via Twitter because he wants to storm chase. Yesterday I arranged with my friend who teaches storm chasing/weather tracking classes at College of DuPage to take Davis on a trip. Warwick is 3'6" tall and is one of Hollywood's top short actors. I had met him at a Star Wars convention when he signed two photos for me. I'm giving back to him by getting the door opened for this trip. I jumped to the front of a line of 36,000 people following him on Twitter.*



Todd Harbour finds comfort and company with his fine feline

Todd has always had pets as friends and now that is he living on his own his preference is cats. He found Selena

at the Hinsdale Animal Shelter two years ago after his first cat passed away. She'd been abandoned on the streets with her collar wrapped under one paw creating a big gash. Someone brought her to the vet. She required a lot of care including a skin graft. After she healed and the search for her previous owner was unsuccessful, she needed a home. Unlike Todd's first cat who was a great friend for Todd but not very affectionate, Selena is a cuddle bug.

She greets me at the door, sleeps with me and loves to play with a pencil which always makes me laugh. I love my cat, she is VERY important to me!

Update from Disability.gov

Disability.gov is a website managed by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), with the mission of connecting people with disabilities, their family members, veterans, caregivers, employers and service providers, with the resources they need to insure that EVERYONE can fully participate in the workplace and in their communities. This site is a great resource which recently started hosting monthly calls to update the public on various disability issues as well as to introduce persons who work on disability issues in the federal government. Check their website monthly to take advantage of these group conference calls.



Christina Barr adores her Poodle Pals Chuck and Jeter

I just love them to death! When they run and play at the dog park with their friends and when they are gentle and affectionate they are the best company. I remember dogs in my home from childhood, but these two brother poodles are the best!

Her love for dogs inspired her to volunteer as a walker at Chicago Canine Rescue.

Financial Seminar Offers Members Insights and Guidance in Money Management

On Saturday, April 2nd, Greek Islands Restaurant was the sight of Step Out's first Financial Seminar. Presenter, Brian Israel, retired banker and Step Out Advisory Board Member, delivered an informative and fun session on personal financial management including tips on budgeting, saving, investing and avoiding financial scams. The session was enlightening and empowering. Members can look forward to additional sessions in 2012.

The attendees were engaged, enthusiastic, took copious notes and were full of good questions, Brian Israel observed. In their post-workshop evaluations, every person described the experience as either "Valuable" or "Very valuable", and indicated that they were either "Likely"

or "Very likely" to change the way they manage their money because of what they learned.



Graduates of the Financial Seminar, Maureen Montgomery and Dan Minow

SAVE THE DATE!

LDA National Convention
Chicago Hilton
February 23-25, 2012

City Tours are Highlight Events for Members



Margaret Hicks

Chicago Elevated was started by Margaret Hicks, local improviser and tour guide. Margaret was a trained docent with the Chicago Architecture Foundation, giving walking and river tours for four years. After starting her own tour company, Margaret wrote, researched and conducted The Second City Walking Tour – receiving great reviews from *The Chicago Tribune* and *Time Out Chicago*. Hicks researched

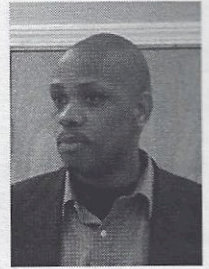
and wrote *The Boystown Tour*, receiving rave reviews from *Gapers Block* and *Chicagoist*. Hicks was also featured in *The Guardian* giving a slide-show tour of Chicago. As a comedian, Hicks has performed with such companies as Second City, The Annoyance Theater, I.O. and The Playground. Hicks says, *I'm really dedicated to creating a casual, cool experience. I want people to have fun and feel comfortable enough to ask me anything.*

Margaret has shown a special interest and dedication to our membership. We are delighted to have found her. She will assist members in learning about Chicago's history and social opportunities through the following five walking tours: Chicago Pedway, Clark Street, Bucktown/Wicker Park, Andersonville, and Haunted Old Town.

Parent/Professional Meeting to Host Outstanding Panel

Save the Date! On Sunday, October 9, 2011, a panel of professionals who are working directly with members of Step Out will be on hand to share their insights and recommendations. This is an opportunity to glean new insights into the continued possibilities for self improvement. Danny Shields, LEED Council instructor who has been teaching computer skills to several members will be joined by Brian Israel, consultant, developer and teacher who is serving on Step Out Advisory Board and Keith Whipple, Drama Therapist and Facilitator for Step Out.

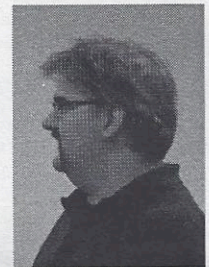
All three gentlemen have offered seminars, facilitated events or taught classes to our members and they will share their insights and answer questions. Their observations and suggestions will be an inspiration to parents as they have been to our members. This event will be held at McCormick and Schmick's Restaurant in Skokie.



Danny Shield



Brian Israel



Keith Whipple

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