

DELAWARE – SUMMER 2010 – TRANSITION

Workshops Focus on Taking Responsibility for Health Care

The ability to take greater responsibility for their own health care will help adolescents and young adults with disabilities and special health care needs transition more successfully into adult life. To help achieve this goal, the Center for Disabilities Studies created Healthy Transitions, a series of three workshops for adolescents, young adults, and their caregivers. It was offered to New Castle County residents in 2009 through funding from DFRC (Delaware Foundation Reaching Citizens with Intellectual Disabilities).

Caregivers and young adults participated in separate classes that covered the same three topics (one per workshop): medical transition, insurance issues, and healthy lifestyles. Caregivers were taught ways in which to support their adolescent or young adult children in becoming more independent in their medical affairs.

Staff from two CDS projects – Healthy Delawareans with Disabilities and Delaware Family Voices Family to Family Health Information Center – facilitated the classes in partnership with the Transition of Care program at the Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children. All participants received a resource book of materials.

During the medical transition class, adolescents, young adults, and their caregivers were taught skills to help ease their health care transition. They learned how to look for a new doctor and what questions to ask when you first meet a new doctor.

The insurance issues class centered on how to navigate Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid programs. For example, young adults learned how they can work and still receive their benefits, while parents reviewed how important it is to stay in contact with insurance companies to ensure that their child is being covered.

The healthy lifestyles portion of the series featured a panel of guests that included a dental hygienist, a Med-Peds physician (a doctor trained in both pediatric and adult care), a nutritionist, and a student in exercise physiology. After speaking about their areas of expertise, the guests interacted with the participants, practiced exercises, and demonstrated oral health care.

Benefits to participants

“I came to the workshop series from two perspectives, as a parent that had already started asking these questions, and as a transition specialist in the Christina School District,” shared Cathy Cowin. “As a parent, I found it helpful because there were some pieces of information and programs I didn’t know about. As a professional, it gave me wonderful resources to share with parents.”

Cathy's daughter, Alyssa, said she learned some valuable information, but also discovered that she was already on the right track: "I learned that I need to call about my appointments for the doctor, but that I already know how to set up medicine for the week, and every week I change it."

Time for interaction before and after each class added a social dimension to the program. "It was great seeing that the young adults were making some really nice friendships with each other, and the parents were supporting each other, too," noted Terri Hancharick, research associate at CDS and organizer of the Healthy Transitions workshops.

The Healthy Transitions workshop series will be offered in Kent and Sussex Counties in the fall of 2010, funded by the Delaware Division of Public Health. For more information, contact Terri Hancharick at 302.831.8374 or terrih@udel.edu.