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From the desk of Jennifer Harrison - Director, Planning for Adult Life

The "Does Art Imitate Life or Does Life Imitate Art?" conundrum is as old as the "Which Came First, the Chicken or the Egg?" debate (or is it that the chicken-and-egg debate is as old as the life-imitating-art conundrum? Discuss...).

So often, what we see on screen, hear through speakers, and behold in marble museums and on dusty streetcorners tell us so much about the world around us. We learn what the artist thinks and feels. And we are confronted - simply by apprehending their work - with what we, too, think and feel. Art shows us their truth and we, as a consequence, form (and sometimes reform) our opinions.

But how much can artistic expression affect how the world views an issue and behaves in response? And can it actually change prevailing perception?

To find out, we turned to an obvious source on the matter: Uganda.

In a study titled **“Art as a Medium for Social Change”** from Kampala International University, scholar Kakembo Aisha Annet examined “how various forms of art—visual arts, performing arts, literature, film, and digital media have historically and contemporarily functioned as platforms for advocacy, identity formation, and systemic critique.”

Not “how does art imitate life?” but “how does art affect life?”

What they discovered is, in short: a lot.

They found that theater shapes societal morals and portrays transformed human conditions; literature ultimately drives fundamental change by resonating with the human heart and soul; The Post Secret [art] Project, active since 2006, provides an opportunity to explore depression and the stigma behind mental illness; and even U.S. national billboard campaigns have received global attention on topics of climate change, healthcare, and civil rights. Paper, clay, voice, and instrument are effective conduits to opened eyes, expanded hearts, and - sometimes - changed minds.

Neurodiversity and other developmental disabilities have recently experienced a resurgence of shameless - and shameful - scorn. Here is some art poised to affect the way people view disabilities, some even created by people with disabilities:  
(Synopses and reviews taken from websites)

### **Books:**

**Art Is Art: Collaborating with Neurodiverse Artists at Creativity Explored**  
By Ann Kappes

This vibrant book uplifts the voices of the artists of Creativity Explored, a nonprofit that gives people with developmental disabilities the opportunity to express themselves through art and share their work with audiences from their local community and in the contemporary art world.

**All the Weight of Our Dreams**

By Lydia X. Z. Brown, E. Ashkenazy, and Morénike Giwa Onaiwu  
The first essay collection written by people of color with autism, the book explores the intersections of autism and race, painting a portrait of the way that these identities intersect — and the ways in which this intersectionality has been largely ignored in mainstream discussions of both race and autism.

**The Kiss Quotient**

By Helen Hoang

This rom-com stars a protagonist with Asperger's, which is a rarity in the genre. Notably, the author discusses her own 2016 diagnosis with autism spectrum disorder in her author biography — and her follow-up standalone book ***The Bride Test*** features an autistic love interest, partially based on her parents' relationship.

**Sitting Pretty**

By Rebekah Taussig

This beautifully written memoir-in-essays explores what it means to grow up “in a body that looks and moves differently” in an ableist culture. Author and disability advocate Rebekah Taussig, Ph.D., is a writer and teacher with a doctorate in Creative Writing and Disability Studies. She argues that “We should bring disabled

perspectives to the center because these perspectives create a world that is more imaginative, more flexible, more sustainable, more dynamic and vibrant for everyone who lives in a body.”

**Film:**

The Reason I Jump (Documentary): Based on the best-selling book by Naoki Higashida 'The Reason I Jump' is an immersive cinematic exploration of neurodiversity through the experiences of nonspeaking autistic people from around the world. The film blends Higashida's revelatory insights into autism, written when he was just 13, with intimate portraits of five remarkable young people. Currently streaming on Amazon Prime, Apple TV, Kanopy, and other services.

The Peanut Butter Falcon: A young man with Down Syndrome runs away from his assisted-living facility to attend a wrestling school and become a professional wrestler.

Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution: A documentary that looks back at Camp Jened, a summer camp for disabled teenagers in the 1950s and 60s, and the camp's impact on the disability rights movement.

Children of a Lesser God: A multi-Oscar nominated film which follows two employees at a school for the deaf: a deaf custodian and a hearing speech teacher, whose conflicting ideologies on speech and deafness create tension and discord in their developing romantic relationship.

Art shows:

[Neurodivergence Gallery](#)

[The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation](#)

[Artists and Activists – National Disability Arts Collection & Archive](#)

Here's to creative work!

Jen

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Wondering what's next when your child turns 21 and graduates from high school? Check out the DDD timeline in either English and Spanish! (Click on the images to make larger)

**Graduates Aging Out of the School System:**  
Accessing Adult Services from the NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities  
**A Timeline for Students Exiting School and Turning 21**

To be determined eligible for services all applicants must complete either the short or the full application

**STEP 1 Apply for Medicaid Eligibility**

- You can learn about Medicaid eligibility for DDD services here: [www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices/medicaid](http://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices/medicaid)
- For additional help, email [DDD.MedHelpdesk@dhs.nj.gov](mailto:DDD.MedHelpdesk@dhs.nj.gov)

**STEP 2 Apply for DDD Eligibility**

- You can begin applying for DDD Eligibility any time after 18 years old.
- Call the DDD Community Services Office closest to where you live and/or download the DDD Eligibility Application here: [www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices](http://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices)

**STEP 3 Complete NJ Comprehensive Assessment Tool (NJCAT)**

- As part of the application process, you will complete the NJCAT with a DDD Intake Worker, usually from the DDD Community Services Office closest to where you live. Learn about the NJCAT here: [www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices/assessment](http://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices/assessment)

**STEP 4 Complete the Support Coordination Agency Selection Form**

- When you are in your last year of receiving school-based services, complete and submit the Support Coordination Agency Selection Form.
- You can research Support Coordination Agencies here: [www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/assets/documents/individuals/support-coordination-agencies-list.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/assets/documents/individuals/support-coordination-agencies-list.pdf)

**September – June: Preparation and Planning**

**Participate in webinars and activities offered about Transition Planning**

- The Planning for Adult Life ([www.planningforadultlife.org](http://www.planningforadultlife.org)) program offers monthly educational sessions for students with intellectual/developmental disabilities ages 16-21 and their families, and other resources, like:
  - Webinars Wednesdays – monthly webinars on transition-related topics
  - GOT PLANS? ONLINE LESSONS – a downloadable guide and fun instructional videos

**Participate in webinars offered by Division of Developmental Disabilities Office of Transition to Adult Life and Employment**

- DDD Welcome Sessions and Transition Thursdays are for people and families to learn about the transition process, including services available through DDD.
- To sign up for DDD Transition news and announcements, scan the QR code or email [DDD.TransitionHelpdesk@dhs.nj.gov](mailto:DDD.TransitionHelpdesk@dhs.nj.gov).



**DDD Community Services**

Egg Harbor Township: 609-300-1898
Flanders: 973-927-2600
Freehold: 732-863-4500
Newark: 973-693-5080
Paterson: 973-977-4004
Green Brook: 908-226-7800
Trenton: 609-292-1922
Voorhees: 856-770-5900

Troutman: 609-292-1922

Voorhees: 856-770-5900

NEW JERSEY HUMAN SERVICES  
Division of  
Developmental  
Disabilities

**Graduados que terminan el sistema escolar:**  
Acceder a los servicios para adultos de la División de Discapacidades del Desarrollo de NJ  
**Una línea de tiempo para estudiantes que terminan la escuela y cumplen 21 años de edad**

Para poder optar a los servicios, todos los solicitantes deben llenar la solicitud breveteada o la solicitud completa

**PASO 1 Solicitar para la elegibilidad de Medicaid**

- Información sobre la elegibilidad para Medicaid se puede encontrar aquí: [www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices/medicaid](http://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices/medicaid)
- Si necesita más ayuda, envíe un correo electrónico a [DDD.MedHelpdesk@dhs.nj.gov](mailto:DDD.MedHelpdesk@dhs.nj.gov)

**PASO 2 Solicitar para la elegibilidad de la DDD**

- Individuos pueden comenzar a solicitar para la elegibilidad de la DDD en cualquier momento después de cumplir los 18 años.
- Llame a los Oficinas de Servicios Comunitarios de la DDD más cercana a su hogar y/o descargue la solicitud de elegibilidad de la DDD aquí: [www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices/assessment](http://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices/assessment)

**PASO 3 Completar la Herramienta de Evaluación Integral de NJ (NJCAT)**

- Como parte del proceso de la DDD, los individuos completarán la herramienta de evaluación integral de NJ (NJCAT) con un trabajador de asistencia o con un trabajador de admisión, igualmente de la oficina de Servicios Comunitarios de la DDD más cercana a su hogar. Aprenda sobre el NJCAT aquí: [www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices/assessment](http://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/applyservices/assessment)

**PASO 4 Completar el formulario de selección de la agencia de coordinación de apoyo**

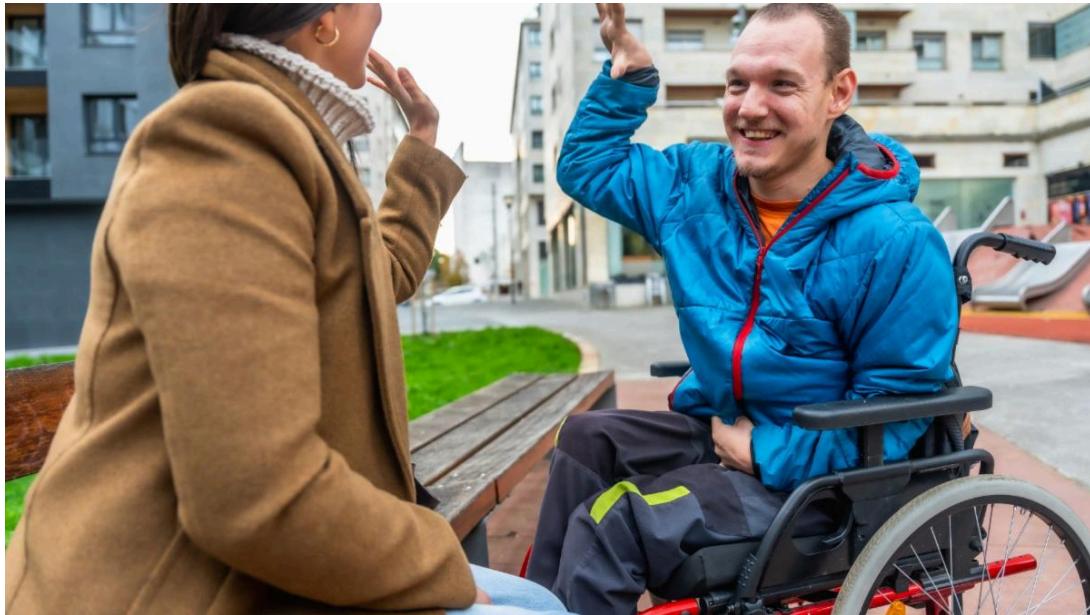
- Cuando el individuo está en su último año de recibir servicios basados en la escuela, el formulario de selección de la agencia de coordinación de apoyo se completa y entra.
- Lista de las agencias de apoyo aquí: [www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/assets/documents/individuals/support-coordination-agencies-list.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/assets/documents/individuals/support-coordination-agencies-list.pdf) (en inglés)



Línea de tiempo para los graduados de la NJDDO:

Mayo 2025

1 de 2



And now a bit about...  
You guessed it: The Power of Art!

**THIS MONTH'S BLOG:**

**The Pen is Mightier Than the Sword... And so is the Clay, the Paint, the Crayon, the Voice...**

By Jennifer Harrison

We tend to turn to the works of Shakespeare and Keats for citable insights when adages are in demand. You know, when nothing short of pithy will do. But one underrated poet from our lifetime is often overlooked when excavating for adages; she is – as I'm sure you've already guessed – Madonna.

Yes, that Madonna.

And I'm not referring to the wisdom revealed in her more obvious masterpieces (who can forget that nugget, "I don't like cities/But I like New York/Other places make me feel like a dork?" Breathtaking...). I'm talking about her oft-echoed refrain, "Express yourself!" Although simplistic, Madonna happened to hit on a meaningful mantra, especially in the realm of developmental disabilities.

(Was it accidental? Yeah, probably.

Will we take it? For sure.)

The truth is, while the arts are often the first to be flung to the wayside with budget cuts and outsized scheduling, they are not only an enjoyable addition but an invaluable staple in the lives of people with physical, intellectual, and communication challenges. Activities including painting, sculpture, song, theatre, improv, photography, and even TikToks (GenZ or not, it's morphed into an art form!) all contribute to the happiness, growth, and mental well-being of our loved ones.

So, why and how should we incorporate artistic expression into a daily or weekly regimen? The answer is as close as...Wisconsin! (Planning for Adult Life is all over the map this month...)

According to Covey, a nonprofit organization and United Way partner in America's dairyland, "Art therapy can move mental focus away from physical discomfort and allow [people with disabilities] to find greater relaxation through creation." They explain that art and art therapy (one and the same? You decide!) build self-esteem, enhance communication, grow social skills, and more. Art also provides an outlet to explore creativity, discover new passions, and increase self-confidence.

This sentiment is echoed by professionals and organizations outside of the Cheddar Haven, as well. Art is touted as providing a nonverbal medium for self-expression, therefore enabling non-traditional communication, an anxiety-reducer and natural emotional outlet, pain inhibitor, and independence foster-er (which may not be a real word, but we bet Madonna would approve!).

Interestingly, art therapy can aid in advancing disability equity, as well, by creating increased engagement and connection with others. Best of all, the proverbial "playing field" is leveled within this subjective expression - there is no pressure to do things "exactly like everyone else" with pen, brush, or drum. In fact, the greatest artists in history have been out-of-the-box creators, innovative thinkers, and risk-takers. In short: there is no disability in art.

Whether you find yourselves with a free hour in the day or traditional therapies don't seem to make the cut, a powerful alternative may be right under your nose! So, when in doubt, vogue!

## UPCOMING WEBINARS:

**PLANNING FOR ADULT LIFE:** Wednesday, February 18, 7:00pm  
"S.O.S.: Support Our Siblings" with founder Harli Glatt and Laurie Liming.

Join SOS founder Harli Glatt and Laurie Liming for an in-depth discussion about the role of siblings in helping care for and transition plan with people with developmental disabilities, including the special nature of the relationship, the responsibilities that come with the role, and how siblings figure into an individual with disabilities' future.

### Planning for Adult Life's MEET US IN THE MIDDLE WEBINAR SERIES

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month, 7pm

#### February 18: "SOS: Support Our Siblings"

Join the founder of nonprofit "Support Our Siblings" for a conversation about what it means to be a sibling of a person with disabilities – growing up, navigating becoming adults together, and planning for the future. Bring your questions and the siblings in your life!

**Register here!**



[Click here to register](#)

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**CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY:** Friday, February 6, 12:00pm

"Let's Talk About It: Disability, Sexuality, and Supporting Teens and Young Adults" with Kristyn White from Creative Options Regina and Natalya Mason from the Division of Social Accountability of the University of Saskatchewan.

Learn about disability, sexuality, talking with families and caregivers about sexual identity, pronouns, and gender, as well as supporting teens and young adults with comprehensive sexual health education.

[Click here to register](#)

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**THE FAMILY INSTITUTE:** Tuesday, February 10, 6:30-8:00pm

"Maximizing Services Under the NJCAT" with The Family Institute Senior Director, Lisa Ford.

In this workshop, parents will learn about the NJCAT and the vital importance of completing it in a way that accurately reflects an individual's true level of independence. The 90-minute presentation includes time for Q&A.

[Click here to register](#)

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**NJ SELF-ADVOCACY PROGRAM:** Tuesday, February 3, 2:00pm

"Alternatives to Guardianship – Highlighting Supportive Decision Making (SDM)" with Craig Ismaili of DRNJ.

Learn about supportive decision making as a team-based, person-centered alternative to guardianship.

[Click here to register](#)

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**UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS - DON'T MISS THEM!**

**THE EMPLOYMENT MENTORSHIP PANEL:**

An **online** event for students considering entering the workforce and their parents! Register below!



Please join us for The Arc of NJ's  
Project HIRE / Planning for Adult Life (PFAL)  
**EMPLOYMENT MENTORSHIP PANEL**

ASK QUESTIONS - OR JUST LISTEN - AND GET ANSWERS!

Panel includes:

- Project HIRE participants
- Parents who helped them through the process
- Employers who can tell you what they are looking for
- And Project HIRE Director Colleen Collick, who oversees it all

**FEBRUARY 12  
1:00PM-2:30PM  
REGISTER HERE!**



[Click here to register](#)

**DINNER AND DEETS (ABOUT TRANSITIONING TO  
ADULTHOOD):**

A FREE **live** event for parents to learn, dine, and enjoy some respite! (Bring your kids - there will be supervised activities!)

Register below!



MARCH  
**18**

WEDNESDAY  
5:00-7:00PM

WITH A SUPERVISED  
ACTIVITY ROOM AND  
DINNER FOR YOUR  
STUDENTS!

# DINNER AND DEETS ABOUT TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD

*Event*

register here:



+

With presentations from

+

THE ARC OF NJ'S PLANNING FOR ADULT LIFE:  
"SSI, MEDICAID, AND DDD SERVICES EXPLAINED"

+

COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED:  
"SELF-ADVOCACY FOR STUDENTS WITH IDD"

**THE ARC OF ESSEX COUNTY: "ALL ABOUT THE ARC OF ESSEX"**

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*Come for the dinner, stay for the information!*

FREE PARKING | FREE EVENT

THE ARC OF ESSEX

50 BURNETT AVENUE # 3 MAPLEWOOD, NJ 07040

NEW JERSEY HUMAN SERVICES  
Division of  
Developmental  
Disabilities

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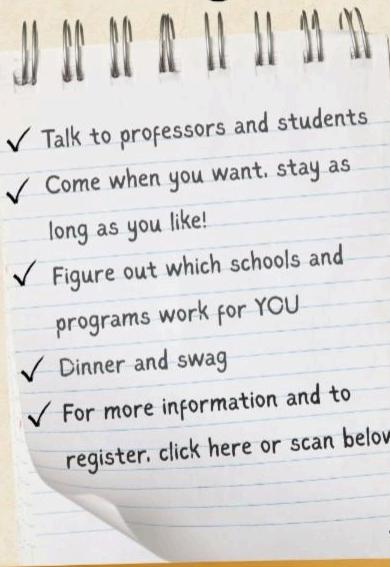
[Click here to register](#)

## THE GREAT COLLEGE FAIR:

A FREE **live** event for students looking at post-secondary education. Enjoy dinner, learn about NJ's best colleges and their transition programs, and leave with swag!

Register below!

# Join Planning for Adult Life for The Great College Fair featuring NJ college transition programs!



- ✓ Talk to professors and students
- ✓ Come when you want, stay as long as you like!
- ✓ Figure out which schools and programs work for YOU
- ✓ Dinner and swag
- ✓ For more information and to register, click here or scan below!



A LIVE EVENT!

Wednesday, April 22, 5:30-7:30pm

at The Arc of Monmouth

1158 Wayside Rd, Tinton Falls, NJ 07712

[Click here to register](#)

## Additional resources

 Durand, Inc. Presents

### Transportation Options for People with ID/DD in South Jersey



**DATE:** January 28, 2026  
**TIME:** 6:00 PM - 7:30 PM  
**VIA:** Microsoft Teams

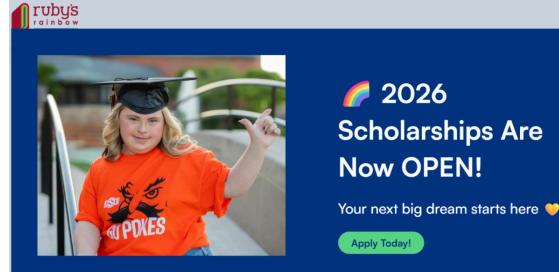
**LINK TO REGISTER:** <https://forms.gle/LvLsVPVPt3EPYtJ7>  
Registration Required. Link to webinar will be provided upon registration.

How do transportation vendors differ from one another? Do they require reservations? Are they covered by DDD budgets? What are their rules and limitations?

Join us as we meet our panel of DDD approved transportation providers who specialize in transporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities!

**PRESENTERS:**





**Want to show the world exactly what people with disabilities can do when entering adulthood?**

Join our social media campaign with Community Access Unlimited (CAUNJ.ORG) with 5-10-second videos featuring teachers, parents, guardians, and especially individuals with developmental disabilities showing off their talents and showing what you can do!

Some examples include:

"I can ride the bus!"  
"I can create a sculpture with clay!"  
"I can take a college class!"

Send in your WE CAN DO THAT! to [helpdesk@planningforadultlife.org](mailto:helpdesk@planningforadultlife.org)

## Join the "We Can Do That" Challenge!

Film a 5-10 segment showing what YOU can do and show the world that people with developmental disabilities can change the world!

Email videos to:

[helpdesk@planningforadultlife.org](mailto:helpdesk@planningforadultlife.org)

Watch some of our submissions below!



## Follow us!



And thanks for reading!

The Arc of New Jersey | 985 Livingston Avenue | North Brunswick, NJ 08902 US

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