

## Meet Casey

Casey is 18 years old and has been receiving special education (including early intervention services) since she was born. She lives in a small mid-sized town in the Midwest with her mother (her parents divorced several years after her younger sister was born) and two siblings (her brother is 2 years older and her sister 3 years younger). She has extended family living in the area, with grandparents and cousins close by. She was born with severe cerebral palsy and intellectual disabilities and was in the NICU for 3 months after her birth. Initially Casey received early intervention services once she came home from the hospital. Services focused on stabilizing her health-related difficulties and providing intensive physical therapy as well as supporting her parents and siblings in caring for Casey. Casey attended a preschool for students with disabilities at the district's developmental center.

Her physical abilities were severely affected by the cerebral palsy and she is unable to walk, talk, sit up on her own, crawl, and has very limited use of her hands. Her intellectual disabilities took longer to determine, and she is classified as having moderate cognitive delays. Currently she uses an electric wheelchair and is learning to navigate it herself through a combination of head controls and one hand. Casey has consistently tested low on vision assessments, although her mother and siblings think she see more than she's given credit for.

Casey seems to enjoy school and especially her interactions with her teachers as well as her peers without disabilities. Early on, it was evident that Casey could intentionally vocalize to express her excitement when engaging in a highly preferred activity or when someone she particularly liked entered the room. Casey especially likes it when her peers without disabilities socialize with her. Her ability to engage with peers seems to come from her experiences at home, where she has always been fully included in her family's life and her two siblings have always included her in their activities with their friends. Casey was introduced to an augmentative communication methods in elementary school (picture communication book) and more recently has started using a speech generating augmentative device that includes an 8-choice screen. She uses other augmentative devices such as switches (e.g., Big Mac) to take turns in interactive games with her peers, as well as to use a computer and other technology.

Casey received physical and occupational therapy as well as speech therapy throughout her educational career. When Casey entered second grade, her classroom was moved from the developmental center to her neighborhood school as the school district decided to move toward a more integrated model for special education. Casey was primarily in a special education classroom for students with severe and multiple disabilities and was only included in the "specials" (music, PE, art) with age appropriate peers. She seemed to truly enjoy being with her peers without disabilities. In fact, one of Casey's greatest strengths became her ability to socially connect with her general education peers. Progressively throughout her elementary years, she came more included into both academic and special activities in the general educational classrooms. However, Casey's functional academic goals stayed the same from fourth through sixth grade, seemingly without much progress. Her mother felt that little systematic intervention was occurring in order to teach Casey new skills.

For middle school, Casey was enrolled in the only special education program for students with significant disabilities, and this program was not in her neighborhood middle school. She was not consistently being included at all with her general education peers, and her mother felt that her educational needs were not being taken care of. When it came time to consider the transition to high school, Casey's mother advocated that she attend her neighborhood school, and receive the special educational services and supports she needed in this inclusive environment.

Once in high school, Casey was involved in multiple educational experiences. Her program focused on community-based instruction and preparing Casey for inclusive adult life outcomes. She was very social with her peers with and without disabilities and spent her time in general education classes (e.g., Home Ec., earth science, computers) as well as community-based experiences. Her IEP goals focused on meeting her transition measurable postsecondary goals of integrated employment, on-the-job training, and supported living. Goals also focused on increasing her communication skills in natural settings (both in school and the community). Casey gained access to a variety of assistive technology devices to support her learning goals, and used switches to complete independent living tasks (e.g., using a blender), as well as to partially participate in vocational training experiences (e.g., shredding paper as part of her office/clerical tasks). Casey continued to enjoy high-energy social situations and loved to attend pep rallies, band concerts and high school dances. She has an engaging personality, likes to flirt, and loves going out in the community.

Casey will finish out the current year in high school and commence with her same-aged peers. She will then move to a community-based transition program for her final three years of special education services. As part of the planning for the transition to this 18-21 program, the school and Casey's family must complete some extensive transition assessments. Casey's family expects that she will work and contribute to her community. They aren't sure of the exact living situation but want her to be connected to her community and be involved in lots of activities. Her brother and sister want her to have the quality of adult life that she has been provided for at home and don't want her to be segregated from society.