



# Independence, Inc. Youth Transition Program

Building a more confident future. One step at a time.







# Independence, Inc.

- Center for Independent Living (CIL)
- Every county across the nation is covered by a CIL
- Federal and State funded
- work with all ages, any type of disability
- person-centered planning
- all programs and services are delivered with the independent living philosophy at the core
- 5 core services (required for federal funding) - Youth Transition is one of those services



## KYTN

- Kansas Youth Transition Network
- developed through a Federal Pathways to Partnership Grant
- funded through the Federal Department of Education and Kansas Department of Education
- purpose is to create collaboration, sustainability and innovation for greater outcomes in youth transition



## YTAWC

- Youth Transition Alliance of Wyandotte County
- council made up of community organizations, service providers, educators, advocates, youth, families
- essential tool in building partnerships and collaboration
- professional development, capacity building, community events, school support





# KYTN Program Manager

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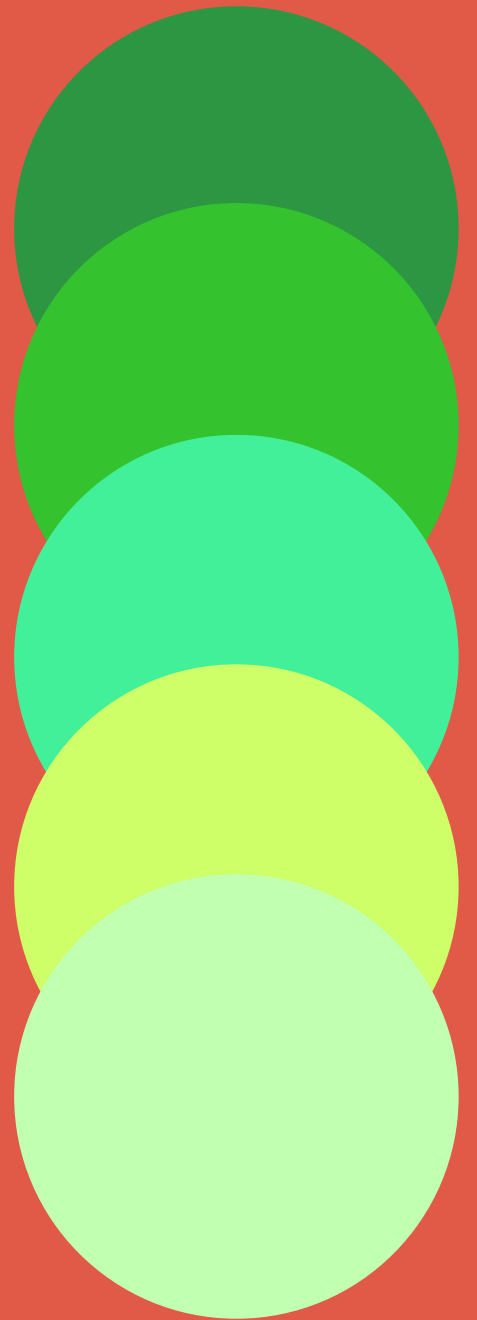




## Youth Transition is...

- ✓ for youth and young adults age 10-24 with any type of disability (including mental/emotional)
- ✓ One-on-one, group, and/or in-class support and training
- ✓ meeting youth and families where they are - no matter what that looks like
- ✓ assisting youth and families with filling out paperwork and applications of all kinds - school, work, volunteer, program assistance, etc.
- ✓ A critical building block along the path to a secure, accessible, bright and thriving future.
- ✓ curriculum and training that is adaptable and shareable
- ✓ resume writing and interview skill-building
- ✓ helping youth discover and develop their goals, interests, potential and vision for the future
- ✓ connecting youth with their communities, volunteer opportunities and peer groups
- ✓ TEAMWORK! And the team can include families, caregivers, teachers, other service providers etc.
- ✓ Professional Development for teaching staff, paras and support staff
- ✓ an essential part of independent living skill-building for youth and young adults with disabilities

What  
exactly  
is  
youth  
transition?





# Why Transition Preparation Matters

## Early transition support changes the narrative.

- from uncertainty to direction
- from reliance to self-advocacy and empowerment
- from dependence to independence
- lack of resources to community support
- from isolation to inclusion
- from just getting by to thriving

By focusing on **job readiness**, **self-advocacy**, and **financial literacy**, it reduces long-term unemployment, fosters community inclusion, and empowers youth to achieve personal, educational, and career goals.

- Early, specialized transition support **helps families navigate services**, reducing stress and fostering more inclusive, resilient communities.
- Transition training **provides tools to navigate the workforce and community**, which are proven skills to aid in the prevention of long-term reliance on crisis-based services
- Creates a **life-long understanding of community support, inclusion and confidence** in seeking and finding resources
- Creates a **sense of self-awareness, identifies goals, challenges and strengths and gives a sense of direction**



# A CIL's Roll in Transition Planning

CIL's youth transition and employment readiness programs are **designed to meet young people where they are and grow with them over time.** Through guided exploration, skill-building, and real-world preparation, we **help youth move from uncertainty to confidence and from potential to opportunity.**

The earlier we start, the stronger the future becomes.

Early transition support doesn't just benefit individuals, it strengthens entire communities.

## Early transition support

- focuses on helping students with disabilities prepare for life after high school academically, professionally, and personally
- can begin as early as age 10, giving students time to explore interests, identify strengths, and build essential life skills.

## This support may include:

- Self-advocacy training
- decision-making skills
- Executive functioning
- Career exploration and goal setting
- Workplace readiness and soft skills training
- Independent living and community navigation

**When introduced early, these tools empower youth to actively shape their futures instead of reacting to limited options later.**

Research and lived experience consistently show that students with disabilities who receive early transition and employment support are far more likely to obtain meaningful employment and live independently after graduation.

## Early support allows youth to:

- Build confidence in their abilities
- Understand their rights and accommodations
- Develop communication and problem-solving skills
- Gain exposure to real-world work environments

## Building Confidence is critical, not just for employment, but also for:

- Continuing education
- Independent living
- Healthy relationships
- Community involvement

When young people with disabilities receive intentional, early support, **they gain more than skills, they gain confidence, independence, and real opportunity.**

The need for self-confidence: Young people must **believe in themselves.** Early transition programs help youth **recognize their strengths, learn to advocate for their needs, and feel empowered to make choices** about their own lives. When youth feel capable and supported, they are more likely to take risks, pursue goals, and envision a future that includes independence and fulfillment.



# Executive Function

## Key Components

### Working Memory:

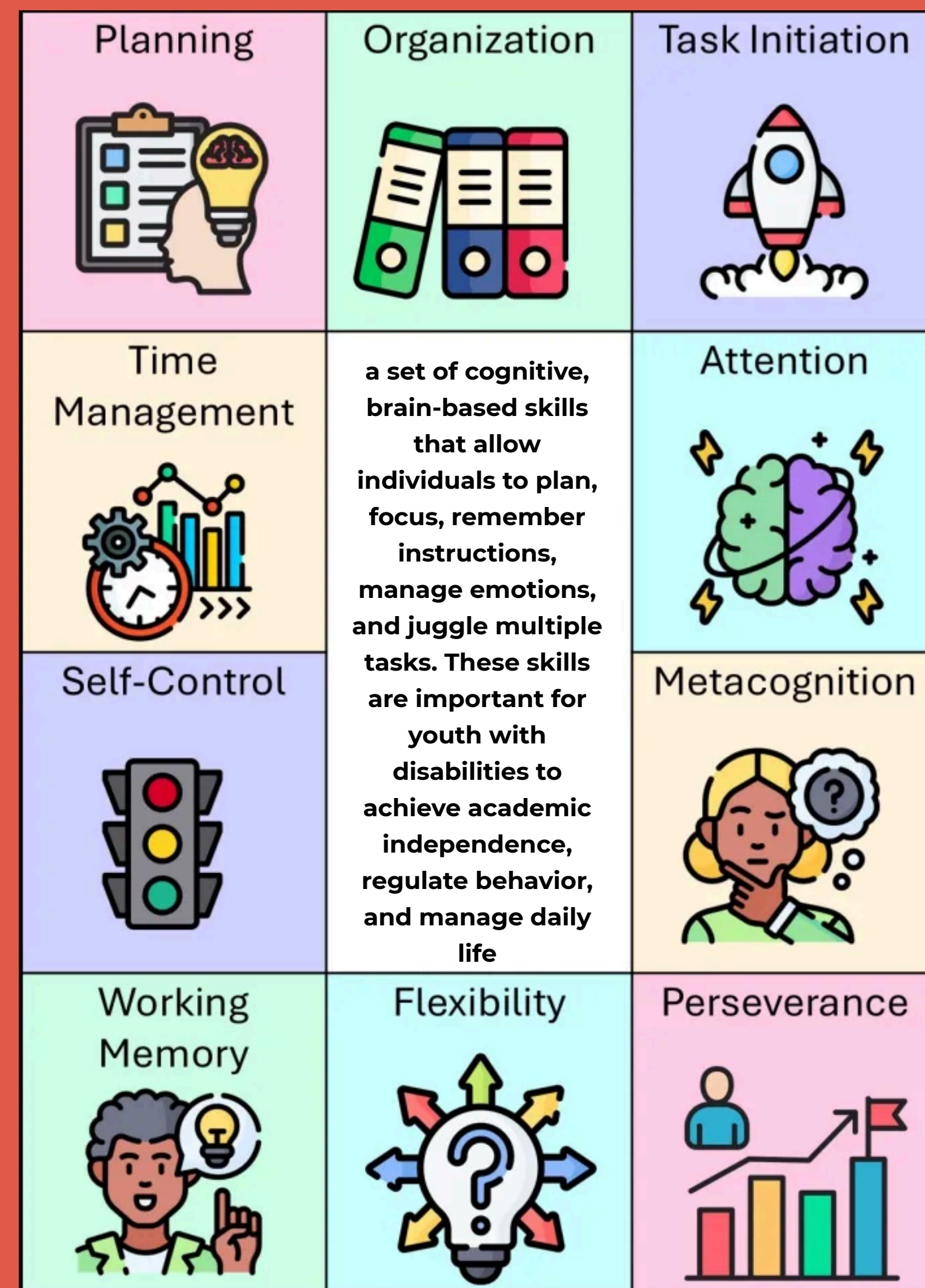
Holding and manipulating information over short periods.

### Cognitive Flexibility:

Adjusting to new situations, shifting attention, and thinking outside the box.

### Inhibitory Control (Self-Regulation):

Managing impulses, emotions, and resisting distractions.





# Our Approach

## Independent Living Philosophy

The independent living philosophy asserts that people with disabilities are the best experts on their own needs, possessing the right to self-determination, maximum control over their lives, and full community integration. It emphasizes consumer control, dignity of risk, and removing societal barriers rather than focusing on limitations

## Person-Centered Planning

a collaborative, ongoing process that empowers individuals—particularly those with disabilities or older adults—to direct their own lives, define their goals, and choose services that align with their personal vision. It focuses on strengths, preferences, and community inclusion rather than just deficits

## Inclusion

ensuring people with disabilities have equal access to, and are actively involved in, all aspects of community life—work, school, and recreation—alongside their peers. It requires removing barriers, fostering a sense of belonging, and providing necessary, individualized accommodations.

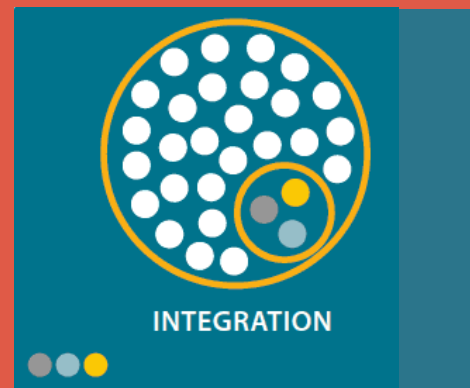
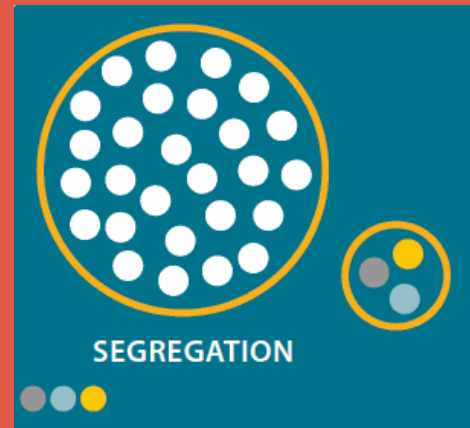
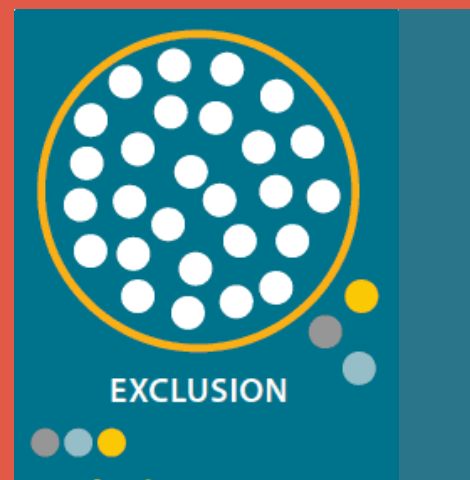


**Exclusion:** Individuals are directly or indirectly prevented from accessing activities, jobs, or programs. They are seen as "outsiders" because they do not fit a designated norm.

**Segregation:** Individuals are provided services, activities or employment in separate environments specifically designed for their needs, such as sheltered work centers or isolated activities, away from the main group.

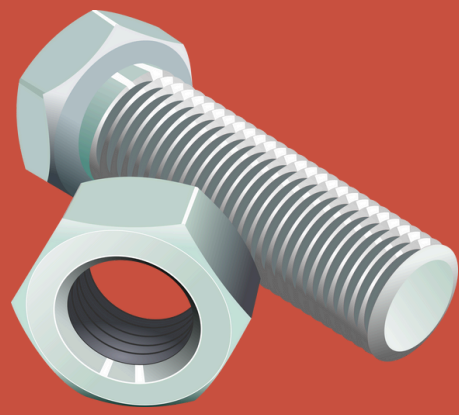
**Integration:** Individuals are placed in existing mainstream settings, but the burden is on them to adapt to the standardized environment without needed accommodations or supports. They may be physically present but not necessarily active or supported participants.

**Inclusion:** A process of systemic reform that removes barriers and modifies environments (content, instructional methods, physical structures) to value and accommodate every individual's diverse needs. It focuses on creating a genuine sense of belonging for everyone.



**Inclusion  
is the goal!**





# The Nuts & Bolts of Our Programs & Services

One-on-One,  
Group and  
In-Class  
Support

- Independent Living Skills Training
- Employment Readiness
- Community Involvement
- Executive Function Skill-Building
- Peer Groups
- IEP Support
- In-Class Training
- Systems Navigation & Application Assistance
- Study Skills and Academic Support
- Self Advocacy Training





# Real World Examples



## Employment/Job-readiness

- Strengths and interest assessments
- Effective communication
- “Thinking Outside the Box” resume-building
- Body language, eye contact
- Mock interviews
- Work-related skill-building
- Budgeting/money management
- Job search
- Application assistance
- Asking for a work accommodation
- Getting along with coworkers

## Education

- IEP planning and support
- Speaking in front of the class/in class
- Effective study habits
- Concentration and attention building
- Peer relations
- Activities/school involvement

## Independent Living

- Cooking, cleaning, organization
- Budgeting, money management
- Public transportation
- Driver’s License acquisition
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Emotional Support Animals
- ADA Rights
- Home security/safety

## Other

- Internet safety
- Healthy relationships
- Public safety
- Systems navigation
- Application Assistance
  - Medicaid
  - HCBS Waivers
  - volunteering
  - medical forms
  - benefits

## Higher Education/College

- Area of study/interest assessments
- Technical training exploration
- College exploration
- Financial Aid application assistance
- Campus visit coordination
- Independent Living training
- Safety and security
- Relationship building strategies





# 1. My student doesn't engage with their classmates and feels isolated



Making connections can be hard at any age and in any circumstances. For youth with disabilities, it may be even more challenging to identify a friendship base and feel included.

We can help by:

- establishing peer group activities
- teaching effective communication
- working on self-advocacy and problem-solving skills
- connecting youth to community activities and volunteer opportunities
- identifying strengths, interests, and needs



# 2.

## **We feel unprepared at IEP Meetings and don't know how to contribute**



**IEP meetings can feel intimidating to students and families.**

**IEP and 504 planning can be a complex process that many students and  
their families don't fully understand.**

**We can help by:**

- **explaining the IEP/504 process in depth**
- **educating on student and family rights**
- **helping you set goals and plan for your IEP**
- **sitting in on IEP/504 meetings**
- **teaching self-advocacy skills**
- **helping build confidence through knowledge of the process**
- **Creating an IEP Podcast with your student**



# 3. My child is just starting middle school - why would we start transition planning so early?



Transition planning and training is like any other necessity - starting early is key. We wouldn't wait until 10<sup>th</sup> grade to start playing an instrument in the high school band would we? Preparing for life after high school takes time. We utilize long-term planning and thinking-ahead techniques to start laying the groundwork for a thriving future.

We can help by:

- early essential skill-building like problem-solving and critical thinking through fun and educational activities
- helping to identify strengths and talents
- creating vision boards and long-term goals
- building effective communication strategies

# **4. I don't think my child will ever be able to work or attend college**



Unfortunately, this thinking is all around us and grew out of wide-spread discrimination against people with disabilities prior to the Civil Rights Movement - and still creates an attitudinal barrier to independent living to this day. With programs, services, supports, training, advocacy and knowing your rights, nearly anyone can work and learn.

We can help by:

- educating on disability rights law
- explaining reasonable accommodations
- identifying strengths, weaknesses and barriers to employment or education
- identifying assistive technology needs
- training in employment readiness skills



# 5. **My child doesn't have a formal diagnosis but is struggling in school**



**We don't require an official medical diagnosis to work with your student. If your child self-identifies as having a disability, we can help. Many disorders like ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, Dyslexia, Sensory Disorders and even difficulty hearing and low vision can often go undiagnosed.**

**We can help by:**

- **listening to your experience and needs and connecting you to appropriate resources**
- **working on social skill-building and peer relations**
- **advocating for accommodations - even if there is not a formal IEP or 504**

# 6. My student will graduate soon and we have no idea what to do



**This is not uncommon! Many people don't realize how much preparation it takes to plan for a successful transition out of high school and into whatever is next. It's never too late to start training and planning for life after high school!**

**We can help by:**

- **creating a transition plan based on the students goals, interests and talents**
- **pre-employment training**
- **job searches and application assistance**
- **independent living skills training**
- **money management and budgeting training**
- **college or technical school-readiness training**



# The Process

## 1. Contact us

**Office:** 1101 Haskell Ave. Suite 201  
Kansas City, KS 66109  
upstairs in the Discover Vision Center

**General office number:** 913-553-3680

**Amy Ballinger, KYTN Manager**  
aballinger@independenceinc.org, 785-371-1646

**Elle Jennings**  
rjennings@independenceinc.org, 785-371-1634

**Will Colling, Independent Living Specialist**  
wcollins@independenceinc.org, 913-533-3680 ext. 122



## 3. Fill out intake form

We are federally and state funded and have to track all of our work. This is short, simple form to gather information for reporting purposes.

## 4. Fill out brief KYTN “survey”

This is for the Federal and State Department of Education for them to gather information

## 2. Set up an initial meeting

Set up a time to meet so we can get to know you and your student. We can meet

- in our office
- at school (if approved by the school)
- at your home
- in a public space (library, coffee shop etc.)

## 5. Let the work begin! (it’s actually more like fun!)

- Create goals
- Create a transition plan
- set up regular meetings, programs or services accordingly
- track our progress
- celebrate milestones!



# Resources

## **KYTN Informational Flyers**

**<https://independenceinc.org/wp-content/uploads/KYTN-Flyers-1.pdf>**

## **Independence, Inc. Website - KYTN**

**<https://independenceinc.org/kansas-youth-transition-network/>**

## **Youth Transition Alliance of Wyandotte County**

**<https://www.facebook.com/ytawc/>**

## **Youth Independence, Inc. KYTN Program Brochure**

**<https://independenceinc.org/wp-content/uploads/KYTN-Brochure.pdf>**



# Peer Groups

## EXPRESSIVE ART GROUP

THE EXPRESSIVE ART GROUP IS A SAFE, CREATIVE SPACE WHERE YOUTH CAN USE ART TO EXPRESS FEELINGS, REDUCE STRESS, AND EXPLORE WHO THEY ARE, NO ART SKILLS REQUIRED.

START DATE: JANURARY 27<sup>TH</sup> 2026  
FROM 4 - 4:30 PM  
AT 11010 HASKELL AVE, KCK 66109 SUITE 201

WE WILL MEET  
THE LAST  
TUESDAY OF  
EVERY MONTH

CONTACT ELLE JENNINGS FOR MORE  
INFORMATION  
RJENNINGS@INDEPENDENCEINC.ORG  
(785)371-1634

Independence, Inc. Peer Groups are formed to support the socialization, entertainment and executive function skill-building needs of youth with disabilities. The two groups currently offered are the Expressive Art Group and The Hangout Board Game Group.

We welcome youth to suggest, create and lead groups under the support and supervision of our staff!

Contact Elle Jennings:  
rjennings@independenceinc.org  
Location 11010 Haskell Ave., Suite 201

## COME HAVE FUN WITH THE HANGOUT! BOARD GAME GROUP

WE MEET THE FIRST  
THURSDAY OF EVERY  
MONTH  
START DATE: FERUARY  
5HT, 2026  
FROM: 4 TO 4:30  
AT: 11010 HASKELL AVE,  
KCK 66109 SUITE 201

THE HANGOUT IS A FUN, LOW-PRESSURE SPACE WHERE YOUTH BUILD SOCIAL SKILLS, TEAMWORK, AND CONFIDENCE THROUGH COOPERATIVE AND INTERACTIVE GAMES.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT  
ELLE JENNINGS  
AT RJENNINGS@INDENPENDENCEINC.ORG  
(785)371-1634

# Q&A

Ask us  
anything...

