

Questions and Answers

Employment: Reconciling Dreams with Reality

by Megan Wood

Q: How can you encourage someone with FASD to follow their employment and education dreams, while at the same time keeping in mind what that individual is capable of doing and the support they will need?

Individuals with FASD are like all others when it comes to goals and dreams. They aspire to things like family, careers, financial success and education. These dreams should be encouraged and respected; individuals with FASD are capable of having many successes in their lives, including long-term employment. However, individuals with FASD often have difficulty with discovering what type of work matches their unique abilities and skills. Misperception of their own skills and abilities, as well as misunderstanding of the necessary steps for different career paths, can often lead to unrealistic and even grandiose employment goals for individuals with FASD.

As an Employment Support Coordinator with the FASD Support Network of Saskatchewan, I often found myself in the uncomfortable position of trying to rectify an individual's career goals with the reality of her or his ability to achieve those goals. I believe that supporting an individual to pursue a job that would set her up for failure would be unfair and unkind; therefore there are times when it is necessary to evaluate why a certain goal may not be a good option. Although this is often necessary, it can be a disappointing process for someone with FASD.

A good starting point is to look at the reasons why that individual may not recognize what job would be suitable. Some individuals may not have the ability to understand the different tasks of a job, or have a skewed idea of what a job entails. When the job duties are fully explained, these individuals may understand that the job would not be right for them. For example, someone might really want to work with computers, until they learn that they would have to use math, which they hate doing! Other individuals may be well aware of what is needed to do a job or to pursue a specific career but they are unable to see their own limitations as they do not have insight into their own skills and abilities. With such individuals,

you may see a pattern of unsuccessful work as they continue to attempt positions that are a poor fit for their specific abilities. They likely have difficulty noticing patterns over time and do not attribute the lack of success to their own limitations. These individuals might need help in understanding more about their disability and their individual strengths. If possible, set someone like this up with a vocational evaluation that highlights their individual strengths.

After the evaluation, go through the results with the individual and create a list of jobs that would be a better match with their interests, abilities and lifestyle.

After using these strategies, some individuals with FASD may still dream of working in a profession that



is unrealistic. It will often be necessary to help the individual identify just what it is about that dream job appeals to them. Perhaps there can be a new path created based on the part of the dream job the individual aspires to. One example of such a situation is a person who dreams of be-

ing a teacher but does not have the ability to go to university. A support worker or family member could help this individual discover what it is about being a teacher that they would enjoy; perhaps they want to work with children. Maybe this individual will never be a teacher, but would make an excellent day care worker or playground attendant. Recreational and volunteer activities can also be used to help realize a dream – maybe she could volunteer at a summer camp, or be a leader of the church youth group.

This can be a long and painful process and individuals with FASD will often need to compromise in many areas of their lives, which is difficult for the individual and for families. What is important to remember is that even when dreams seem unattainable, they give us important insight into the interests and passions of someone with FASD, insight that the individual often would not be able to provide to you in other ways. By using this information and making adjustments when necessary, we can help an individual with FASD find employment that gives a sense of meaning and belonging in their life.