

### **Ingham Impact Episode 3: Transition**

The SAIL Program stands for Skills for Adult Independent Living. I would like to think that every program is a transition program. At every step of life, from preschool on you're preparing for the next step, and for us, for these students, their next step is adult life. They will leave here, no longer be bound to the hours of school, no longer have the support of school. We're trying to transition the students from their school life to their home life, whatever that home life is for them. Whether it's working, group home, being with their parents, but to have the transition so that they are able to be productive citizens in the community and fulfill their goals. Provide opportunities for students who are otherwise looked over, not necessarily thought about to be given those opportunities. That is the underlying crux of what we're doing here. It's just showing people that our students are capable of so much more than some may expect. Often times our students aren't really ever given the opportunity to show that they can add value-added jobs to a position. That they can do the same jobs as a person without disabilities. We provide a lot of other things along with it to make sure that the opportunity is of a quality learning experience. A typical day: the students come in, about six to eight students will prepare to go out to work. So they all have uniforms that they have to wear so that they look appropriate in the community. The other students will have breakfast. We typically start our day with CNN News, Student News, and we just like to keep the students in the know of what's going on, understand the world around them. We have life skills where we would have them get ready for lunch, unload the dishwasher, do laundry, wipe tables, sweep; things that you would normally do at home so that they kind of learn the skills to do that. We work on life skills and reading, and that's really an important component for a lot of them, especially going out into the workplace because a lot of jobs ask them to be able to read different things, understand different information that is in written form. Our typical day at School to Work is our students will every morning, they go right to their work sites, where they will be for a few hours everyday. Once they've completed their work sites for the day they come back down to the ISD for their classroom portion of the program, and it's in the classroom portion where we start working on those soft skills. The employability aspects of the program, do a lot of career exploration, and we'll also work on the hard skills that they'll need. So if we need to improve reading fluency levels, we'll work with reading fluency. Math, money; just those things that we need to be successful employees. What we want to see is a student go through all the levels of intervention that we can provide, either at their local districts or at the ISD, and then see them be successful upon completion of that educational process that they've gone through. Three of the students that I have right now I had when they were in middle school, in Lansing, so we actually knew each other when they were eleven and then we've come full circle when they're in their twenties. It has just been amazing to see, just in the few months that I've been here, the turn around. And one of the students, for

Christmas, wrote me a letter, and actually thanked me for coming back into his life, and he said that he was reminded of his expectations, and reminded of what he was supposed to be doing, and he hoped that he was making me proud. Just seeing him grow and mature as an individual since I've been here, it's why I do this and it's been the best part of being here so far. Rather than just seeing a kid go through a normal educational process and then saying "Alright, you've graduated. Here's your certificate of completion. Here's your diploma. What's next?" They have an idea of what is next. They know what their next step is going to be by the time they graduate from our programs. Wraparound services from our community partners are in place. So, we're just making sure that we set them up as best as we can for future success after they've completed their public education. Hopefully we can educate the parents on what their child can do, that they don't just have to be home, that they can be out and be community members, and that hopefully we can help them, so that they can help us with the students so they can be productive and have a happy life. Not only do we impact the students, but I really believe that we have a profound impact on the businesses who hire our students. It's a paradigm shift for a lot of these businesses to accept that people with disabilities are employable. Not only are they employable, but they can be excellent employees that are employee of the month caliber employees. Without Ingham ISD providing the services and the resources for these students to get this education and the training, that would not be possible for these businesses to realize the value of adding people with disabilities to their work force. We are creating future citizens and I think that's what everyone wants to have: functional, reliable, honest community participants, and whether these students leave here prepared to do competitive job employment or voluntary work, or whatever. They are being trained to be citizens that we can be respectful of and be proud of.

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