



Special Promotion

We help individuals with disAbilities;  
DEFINE...Goals For A Future  
NOURISH...Hope For A Full Life  
CREATE...Resource Teams To Reach Their Goals

Helping Other People Envision...

# It took on a Life of it's Own...

by April Brooks Morris

## A little encouragement goes a long way!

In the Spring of 2000, I received a phone call from my Aunt Judy (Barclay). Ah, how excited she was! She and her good friend Jan Cobb had just been awarded a contract from the Federal Resource Center SERRC program to write a BOOK. "Wow! Cool... a book. Do tell me more!"

The "workbook" is to be a collection of resources for parents that have children with disAbilities, but they wanted to take it a step further. Now, this is the best part... they want to give these parents a "user-friendly guide" book... to help them work with their children to identify their individual strengths, capabilities, and potential. Ultimately encouraging them to visualize a greater, brighter future than what they could ever imagine possible. Now, I know this sounds like a grandiose statement. "It's amazing to me the power we hold... in how a little encouragement goes a long way, both to the children with disAbilities and to the parents."

Feeling very inspired by all this... "OK, how can I help?" I asked. Judy and Jan gave me this huge smile... "Glad you asked!" Thus began our nightly work sessions for the next 8 months. They wrote the content, and I took their words and formatted it, with illustrations, into a final printed piece. I was so impressed at their diligence. They really thought through the whole

process with such great detail. This was very personal for them. Judy and Jan are parents of children with disAbilities. They understand the daily challenges and frustrations that never go away... the seemingly simple tasks which become monumental, the feeling of "No Control" and hearing the words "No, they can't" and "Never" over and over again. Emphasizing "Abilities" in each young person (that has been diagnosed with disabilities) is their goal.

## It took on a life of its own!

Originally, we were supposed to produce only 500 copies for the state of Alabama. In 2001, as soon as the first batch was printed... representatives from The Office of Special Education Services (O.S.E.P.) were visiting Alabama reviewing the Federal Resource Centers SERRC Program... and they saw the workbook. This is where the explosion happened! O.S.E.P. was so excited about what we had created, that they asked us to work with them to "vet" the workbook for use across the U.S. and the territories.

We went from printing 500 copies to 10's of thousands of copies to be available for use across North America. Also, within the first year... our workbook was being distributed into 4 international countries. We finished the Spanish Edition a few years later. Voila! This is how the Full Life Ahead Foundation of H.O.P.E... Helping Other People Envision was created. The workbook took on a life of its own!

## What do we do?

Today, the Foundation ships workbooks all over the country to school systems, organizations, individuals with disAbilities, families, and agencies. We have trained professionals conducting H.O.P.E. Team Meetings in an individual's home community, training conferences, seminars & workshops. Three times a year, everyone looks forward to the family weekend workshop/retreats at Children's Harbor on Lake Martin. During the weekend, we include 4 tracks covering all ages, for the children, teens, single adults, parents, caregivers, educators & service providers. We offer concurrent individual and family tracks covering... life planning, goal setting,



employment options, and community involvement — "a map for achievement"! We make sure to include a "fun program" for the children.

Helping an individual, a family, school or community assist young people (with a disAbility)... go from where they are now... to where they "want to be in life"... is a step by step process. Life is not about what someone can give you; it's about what you can achieve yourself. Through our H.O.P.E. Network, we are able to work with individuals and organizations across North America to achieve great success for individuals and families.

## Our achievement process

**1 HOPE:** Our experience is that NOTHING happens without HOPE. Among all of the day to day duties and must do's, the time to HOPE seems to be pushed out and minimized. Hope is a hard thing to do when you have a DISability. Everyone is always looking at the DIS--. We know what is possible, because we have seen what IS possible! When an individual or their parents and community have HOPE, they can... dream.

**2 DREAM:** What is the future about? Is it about what people are comfortable with me doing, or is it about what I DREAM to do? People with disAbilities have dreams for the future that need to be nurtured. When DREAMS are created, it is time to start... planning.

**3 PLANNING:** That's right! Individuals with disAbilities can create a LIFE PLAN. How will they ever know the road until they know the destination? What are the supports that are necessary to achieve the Dream? Look around and find a... community.

**4 COMMUNITY:** The community many times would like to help, but doesn't know how. This is where H.O.P.E. Teams can come into play. And there aren't many handbooks (other than ours) that tell a person (with a disAbility) how to find and nurture that support. Then, put it into the "action plan" complete with responsibilities and timelines.

Continue...



**5 ACHIEVE:** This leads to ACHIEVEMENT. Achievement is a huge step in the process because it gives an individual with a disAbility, their family, teachers, community and service providers HOPE; and HOPE breeds a bigger dream... and the process starts all over again.

The Full Life Ahead Foundation is a diverse organization. Collaborating with other organizations, national presenters, and utilizing our H.O.P.E. Teams is how we can effectively help and work with "our families"...all of which is free. Proudly, we have helped many people find a job or start a career. And, at our weekend retreats, our presenters have graciously spent one-on-one time working with many families.

## Positive change impacts individuals with disAbilities!

We have witnessed this over and over again through our interactive workshop trainings, and through our one-on-one technical assistance. Whether it is a couple of hours a day, or a weekend work session... lives are impacted!

## What a Novel Idea

The NEXT CHAPTER BOOK CLUB (NCBC) is coming to Birmingham. The Full Life Ahead Foundation, in collaboration with the Birmingham Literacy Council and Children's Rehabilitation Service, has begun training Facilitators for the NCBC. Each week across the United States, groups of adolescents and adults, with a wide range of reading abilities, gather with two trained volunteers in local bookstores and cafés to read. The Clubs achieve four outcomes: improved reading, increased comprehension, socialization, and inclusion. NCBC members are learning, making friends, and having a lot of fun doing it!

The first NCBC meeting begins in Alabaster at the Books-A-Million on Thursday, October 27, from 4:30 - 5:30 PM and each week thereafter. If you are interested in learning how "YOU can be involved", contact Judy Barclay at (205) 222-1969, [JudyBarclay@FullLifeAhead.org](mailto:JudyBarclay@FullLifeAhead.org). For more information about NCBC go to [www.nextchapterbookclub.org](http://www.nextchapterbookclub.org)



## Christopher's Story...

Challenged by autism and catatonia, Christopher and his family fought a system that didn't seem to care about his needs or his future.

Christopher's mother, Christina Hensel shares "We were in crisis mode... I was depressed. We didn't know if he would be going from hospital to hospital." Christina and her husband Jerry felt alone, and Christopher himself felt so despondent that his health deteriorated. Jerry shares... "when he was at his lowest, we wondered if he was going to live much longer. It was sad and depressing." Christina said, "it was like being in a dark tunnel, not really being able to see the light. Someone told us to contact Full Life Ahead Foundation."

The Full Life Ahead Foundation first helped place Christopher at The Learning Tree, his home away from home. Nicole Dieckow (Christopher's teacher) shares... "when we first met Christopher, it was a little bit different working with a person that has autism and catatonia. Math was the first area where we could see success. Math is something that you don't have to express in order to do. He wanted to impress us and show us what he was all about." Millie Price (Christopher's teacher) shares... "he started talking, slowly, and progressively talked more and more. Chris is one of those kids you always look forward to working with everyday."

The Hensel family wanted even more for his future. They got their wish! Christopher's story has been a perfect fit for Pleasant Valley High School in Calhoun County. "I really felt passionate and advocated for Chris to go to school, especially to get socialization with other kids. Chris has really good academic skills" said Nicole Dieckow.

Christopher is excelling in academics, sports, & choir. Everyone was ready for the next step.

"He has really opened up a lot of people's eyes to someone having disabilities. Chris is treated like any other student here. He goes to each and every class. Every kid CAN do everything. It's been truly remarkable the progress that he has made. The future is his!", shares Adam Goosby (Christopher's Science Teacher at Pleasant Valley H.S.)

Jerry is excited, "we are looking at him working toward and achieving an academic diploma, which is very encouraging!"

"I think the Full Life Ahead Foundation is incredible! They have taken a child who was not being given the chance (to excel). They worked with him, worked with the parents, and are working with other organizations to help this child to become capable of living semi-independently. They turned this disability that he has into an ABILITY" says Adam Goosby. "This situation has really raised the bar for me...working with Chris... wanting to do more" says Nicole Dieckow.

"They are one of the only organizations that were able to help Christopher with his crucial needs" says Jerry. With a warm smile, Christina adds "In our darkest hour, the Full Life Ahead Foundation brought sunshine to our life." Visit our website to watch Christopher's Story & other "Success Stories"



## Are you inspired?

For the past 10 years, as a volunteer, I have enjoyed watching a small concept blossom into the diverse organization it is today.

To those that are reading this article... I hope I have inspired you! We cordially invite you to come join us... in positively affecting the lives of some wonderful young people. You can make a difference! Come & volunteer at our weekend retreats. Or, if you love tasty cuisine, be a guest at our annual Chef's Peach Sensation Event. Ah! And our grand finale at the end of the year... our annual "Dare to Dream Gala"! (December 1, 2011 at The Hilton Perimeter Park, [www.FullLifeAhead.org](http://www.FullLifeAhead.org) for tickets & info.)

## A Special Thank You...

The Full Life Ahead Foundation is so very grateful to our entire group of volunteers, patrons & businesses that donate money & "in-kind" services, products & materials. We humbly say... "THANK YOU"! Cheer's to a fantastic 10 years... and we look forward to the future. ■