

JUNE 2026



Transition Trove

**A Quarterly Newsletter
Packed with Resources to Prepare Youth with Disabilities
for Life Beyond High School**



The Exceptional Children's Assistance Center is pleased to announce the winners of the 2026 Matthew C. Graziadei Achievement Scholarship Award. This year, we recognize three incredible seniors who reflect the qualities that defined Matthew: determination, perseverance, persistence, dedication, and confidence.



Award Winner: ZhiLei Moyer
Denver Christian Academy, Denver, NC

ZhiLei was adopted in 2017 and moved to the United States from China. He has Osteogenesis Imperfecta (brittle bone disease) and has overcome many personal challenges throughout his life. He has faced these challenges with “grace, flexibility, and a sense of humor,” said Cynthia Matson, Curriculum Coordinator and MTSS Interventionist at Denver Christian Academy. “It is easy to forget that Z is in a wheelchair because he never makes that an excuse for not doing what is expected or for living his life to the fullest,” she said.

Throughout school, ZhiLei has remained involved in extracurricular activities and volunteered his time in the community. He continues to take weekly Mandarin Chinese lessons to remain fluent in his native language and enjoys attending summer camps through Cornelius Parks and Recreation. His volunteer work includes serving with Lake Norman Food Mission, Samaritan's Purse, and Huntersville ARP Church.

Academically, ZhiLei has excelled at both Denver Christian Academy and Gaston Community College while still in high school. In tenth grade, he inquired about dual enrollment at Gaston College to prepare for graduation and a future career in engineering. He maintained an A average throughout his junior and senior years at both schools. “Even if my body was not physically strong, my mind is the strength that will carry me through life,” ZhiLei said.

In addition to his activities and coursework, ZhiLei has worked as a cashier at Publix for the past two years. “He has been an excellent example of never letting his physical limitations or cultural differences get in the way of success. He is an outstanding member of our school community, inspiring both students and teachers with his positive outlook,” said Matson.

ZhiLei will continue his studies this fall at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, majoring in engineering. He hopes to pursue a career in robotics engineering.

This award included a \$1,500 scholarship.

Congratulations, ZhiLei! We wish you continued success in all that lies ahead.



\$1,000 Runner-up Award Winner: Caden Karner
Sanderson High School, Raleigh, NC

“Imagine if the whole course of your life was altered completely out of nowhere and when you least expected it.” These words from Caden Karner describe the moment he first noticed a blurry spot in his right eye during seventh grade. Before the end of the school year, he was diagnosed with Leber’s Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON), a condition that rapidly affects central vision. Within a month, he was considered legally blind.

Despite this life-changing diagnosis, Caden never allowed it to limit his potential. “Caden never faltered, demonstrating adaptability, motivation, and self-determination. Rather than allowing LHON to limit his potential, he consistently learned new skills to mitigate his vision loss,” said Heather Livingstone, Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments for Wake County Public School System.

Caden learned braille and adapted to using screen readers and talking calculators. According to his teachers, he rose to every challenge both inside and outside the classroom. He enrolled in honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, including advanced STEM classes. He also participated in NC State’s award-winning Catalyst Program, designed for students with disabilities interested in STEM careers. Through the program, he completed mini internships and developed career readiness skills.

“Caden is a young man who does not give up in the face of adversity, but strives to overcome the obstacles and barriers life has placed before him,” said Judy Davenport, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the NC Department of Health and Human Services. “His resume and grades speak to his strong work ethic and academic strengths. He is focused, determined, and very intelligent. More importantly, he is a young man of exceptional character.”

After high school, Caden will attend the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and study computer science. He chose Charlotte because of their strong computer science program and support for students with visual impairments.

Lindsay Martin, Social Studies teacher at Sanderson High School, shared, “I firmly believe that Caden is going to do incredible things in the future and am certain that any school, employer, or community will be lucky to have him on their team.”

Way to go Caden! Congratulations!



\$1,000 Runner-up Award Winner: Lucas Kipka
Green Level High School, Cary, NC

Motorcycles, music, and game design are just a few of Lucas Kipka’s many interests—and he excels in them all. At age twelve, Lucas began experiencing visual disturbances, including white flashes of light and shifting shadows wherever he looked. After consultations with more than

fifty doctors, he was diagnosed with Visual Snow Syndrome. Rather than allowing his diagnosis to define him, Lucas used it as motivation to make a meaningful impact on the world around him.

“Music became my refuge, a place where I could create without sight,” Lucas shared. He adapted his studio space to meet his needs, including replacing bright drum heads with black ones. He has taken classical violin lessons and currently studies drums and guitar at the Cary School of Music. His musical talents have led him to perform with an orchestra at Meredith College, participate in a youth jazz lab at NC State, and perform in his high school musical.

In addition to music, Lucas has a passion for mechanics and technology. He founded the Green Level Motorcycle Club and is also a 3D designer, game designer, and PC builder. His advisor at Green Level, Alex Garver, believes Lucas is destined for success beyond high school. “Despite the challenges brought about by his vision issues, Lucas has not let them slow him down. Even though these limitations affect his daily life and sometimes require assistive technology, it speaks to his character that he has overcome these medical challenges by seeking solutions that work for him and by working harder than many other students might have to,” he said.

Lucas has also pursued challenging opportunities outside the classroom, including a summer internship at Resolve BIM, where he developed a tool for interactively positioning objects in 3D scenes for construction design software. His supervisor, Stefan Trklja Countryman, Ph.D., described the project as highly ambitious for a high school student. “It was largely self-guided, requiring college-level math, 3D graphics, and programming skills that Lucas had to learn through short weekly meetings and independent study. He approached the challenge with enthusiasm and courage, completing an impressive project and learning a great deal along the way.”

Lucas is interested in pursuing business, computer science, and Spanish in college. He has applied to both Columbia University and Dartmouth College. Reflecting on his experience with a visual impairment, Lucas said, “I’ve not only coped with my condition, I’ve proactively modified and adapted my environment to my needs by developing lenses with automotive tint, trying assistive technology, advocating for myself with teachers, and collaborating with physicians and researchers about my rare condition.”

As Dr. Countryman noted, “Lucas is one of the most impressive people his age that I have known. He possesses the innate curiosity and drive needed to do great intellectual work and make excellent use of the resources he is given.”

Congratulations, Lucas, and best wishes for continued success in all your future endeavors.



New, FREE continuing education course by Work Together

NC!



[Work Together NC](#) has launched a free, self-paced Continuing Education course in partnership with UNC's School of Social Work: *Supporting the Transition to Adulthood and Beyond for Individuals with I/DD*

This course was designed for disability service professionals, including teachers, social workers, occupational therapists, vocational rehabilitation counselors, care coordinators, and others supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The course includes modules on:

- An introduction to the Work Together NC website
- Employment
- Postsecondary Education
- Housing & Community Living
- School-Based Transition Services
- Adult IDD Services
- Additional Transition Planning Considerations

This resource is a valuable tool for professionals working to support successful transitions to and through adulthood for individuals with I/DD.

[Click Here to Take the Course](#)

Student-Led Transition IEP Toolkit



The [Student-Led Transition IEP Toolkit](#) from [RAISE](#) provides educators, and youth-serving organizations with ready-to-use videos and accessible worksheets designed to build student voice, self-advocacy, and leadership within the IEP and transition planning process

All videos reference and align with the screen reader–friendly versions of the accompanying documents to ensure accessible use for all learners.

Across four sections and a wrap-up video, students develop self-awareness, learn about their rights, create meaningful transition goals, and build the skills to lead or co-lead their own IEP meetings. Each section includes instructional videos and screen reader–friendly resources to support inclusive implementation in classrooms, workshops, and family engagement settings.

Together, these tools promote self-determination, collaboration, and meaningful student participation in transition planning.

[Click Here to Access the Toolkit](#)

Newly Revised Transition Modules from IRIS Center



Secondary Transition: Interagency Collaboration

This module defines interagency collaboration and explains its role in transition planning for students with disabilities. It addresses the importance of partnerships among school personnel and various agencies, in addition to providing strategies for this collaboration

[Click Here to View the Module](#)

Secondary Transition: Person-Centered Transition Planning

This module underscores the benefits of person-centered transition planning for students with disabilities. It addresses strategies for engaging students throughout the transition planning process and highlights considerations for shifting to a more person-centered approach.

[Click Here to View the Module](#)



The EIPD Insider

The **NC DHHS Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD)** recently launched a new newsletter called "The EIPD Insider." The newsletter highlights client success stories, staff achievements, important data updates, resources, and upcoming events.

Sign up below to stay connected and receive the latest updates from EIPD.

[Sign up for the EIPD Newsletter](#)

DB101
NC

North Carolina Disability Benefits 101 has a new section for young people!

[NC DB 101](#) has articles about the challenges young people face and dedicated information about youth benefits rules. There's also an

easy-to-use School and Work Estimator that shows how school and work go together.

Many people with disabilities fear that if they go to work, they'll lose needed health care and other disability benefits. Disability Benefits 101 (DB101) helps people with disabilities and service providers understand the connections between work and benefits. DB101 will help you make informed choices and show you how you can make work part of your plan.

DB101 provides:

- *Information: Learn about benefits program and rules around work. Get answers to frequently asked questions. Find out how to avoid common pitfalls.*
- *Estimators: Get results tailored just for you that helps you plan and set goals for work. Get tips for success for your individual situation.*
- *Experts: Find answers to your questions. Connect to community resources. Read the Next Steps section of each article to learn about expert resources.*

[Click Here to try the School and Work Estimator](#)

(CLICK ON DOCUMENT IMAGES BELOW TO DOWNLOAD)

The Arc logo: *Achieve with us.*
For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities

My Future Plan

- Part 1: About Me
- Part 2: Where I Live
- Part 3: My Daily Activities & Social Connections
- Part 4: Supporting My Daily & Major Life Decisions
- Part 5: Financing My Future

Clear Form

Making A Future Plan

Talking about what a person with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD) wants and needs for the future is an important part of person-centered planning. A future plan—sometimes called a letter of intent—is often the first step in this process.

A future plan is a written guide that explains a person's daily routines, preferences, support needs, and goals for the future. It's not a legal document, but it can complement legal and financial plans by providing personal details

Join a national research program
dedicated to better transitions for students with disability

GET STARTED
Seeking 10 teams nationwide

Transition planning for high school students with disability can be challenging. Many administrators and educators want to do it more effectively.

TCSS+ is a first of its kind research project designed to improve transition planning in your school district. No matter where educators are on the journey or if your district is urban, rural, or suburban.

How it works?

- 6 weeks of LEARNING
- 6 weeks of DOING
- 6 weeks of COACHING

FUNDING AVAILABLE
www.tccselfstudy.org

Transition Coalition
Self Study +

NTACT:C Invites Schools to Join the Transition Coalition Self Study

Recruitment is now open for 10 schools to participate in the Transition Coalition research study, funded by a US Dept of Education grant. The opportunity offers high-quality professional development for high school teams:

- Training to improve transition planning and assessment
- Create a custom transition assessment toolkit
- Participate in post-training coaching for further improvements.

about the person with IDD that are not typically included in formal paperwork.

The Arc's [future planning template](#) makes it easy to get started! Remember to review and update this plan at least once a year. As life changes, this document should change too.

During Fall 2026 or Fall 2027, the research study will examine educator and student outcomes. Funding for participating is available.

[Click Here to Learn More](#)

North Carolina's Got Talent



SEARCH



Calling all NC Youth, Ages 5 to 26, with Disabilities!

ECAC's Youth Advisory Team members are seeking entries for the next issue of YEP - Young Exceptional Perspectives. YEP's NCGT column was created to put a spotlight on the many talents and abilities of NC Youth & Young Adults with Disabilities ages 5 to 26. The format of submissions can be a poem, artwork, blog, video, song, essay, article, presentation, an "About me" article", you name it.

ECAC's Youth Advisory Team members will review the submissions and choose which ones to feature in our next newsletter.

Selected entries will receive a \$25 check in the mail!

**The deadline for submissions is
5:00 pm on Thursday, October 1, 2026.
10 Winners Will Be Selected!**

[CLICK HERE FOR NCGT ENTRY FORM](#)

We Are Hiring!



we are
HIRING!

JOIN OUR
TEAM

FULL-TIME TRANSITION COACH

35 - 40 hours per week

REMOTE WORK!

FULL-TIME TRANSITION COACH

Join our fast-paced team in supportive and welcoming environment. The ACHIEVE Transition Program is a virtual Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program for students with disabilities. The ACHIEVE Transition program delivers curriculum to students ages 14-21 to support a smooth transition from high school to either work, technical training or school. The Transition Coach will conduct Job Exploration Counseling and deliver lesson plans virtually to students enrolled in ECAC's ACHIEVE Transition Program. Lesson plans will cover self-advocacy, job exploration, workplace readiness and financial literacy.

This position qualifies as fully remote with occasional in-person staff meetings and workshops.

ESSENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TRANSITION COACH

Lesson Preparation:

- Develop and refine curriculum materials for self-advocacy, workplace readiness, and financial literacy courses
- Collaborate with colleagues and stakeholders to ensure alignment with program goals and student needs.
- Regularly review and familiarize yourself with the curriculum materials for effective delivery.

Teaching:

- Deliver engaging and interactive lessons on self-advocacy, workplace readiness, and financial literacy.
- Create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that encourages active participation and skill development.
- Adapt teaching strategies and materials to meet diverse learning styles and needs.

Communication:

- Respond promptly to emails from students, parents, colleagues, and stakeholders.
- Follow up with students individually to provide guidance, support, and encouragement.
- Communicate regularly with program staff to coordinate activities, share updates, and address any issues.

Data Entry:

- Maintain accurate records of student attendance, grades, and progress in the program database (e.g., Salesforce).
- Enter grades, summary reports, and other relevant data in a timely and accurate manner.
- Generate invoices for program services provided.

Technology:

- Enter data in Encore and Salesforce with accuracy and timeliness
- Proficient in Zoom, Quizziz, Google Meets and Google Suites

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS:

- A degree in Special Education and/or teaching certificate required
- 3 years of experience teaching middle or high school students with disabilities strongly preferred
- Ability to work independently
- Minimum of one year experience with online teaching preferred

OTHER

- Represents ECAC, as assigned, at meetings of selected task force groups, interagency councils, advisory board, commissions, etc.
- Attend Transition fairs and other events to share ECAC information
- Attend other meetings/trainings as required
- May be required to work occasional evenings and/or weekends
- Other duties as directed or requested by Supervisor and Executive Director
- Maintain a current Driver's License and insurance
- Maintain a clear background check

Hours: 35-40 hours per week

Salary: \$25.00 per hour with generous paid leave and retirement benefits

Equipment: All equipment is provided

To be considered for this position, applicants MUST submit both a resume and cover letter. Please email your application materials to jobs@ecacmail.org

As an equal-opportunity employer, ECAC believes that equal opportunity for all employees is important for the continuing success of our organization. In accordance with federal and state laws, ECAC's decisions and practices will not be influenced or affected by, race, color, creed, religion, national origins, ancestry, citizenship, sex, marital status, veteran status, disability, age or any other characteristics protected by law.



Contact Us
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