

THE MAPS PROCESS FROM AN INTERN'S PERSPECTIVE

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As a CDBS intern, I am required to complete fifteen points of internship experiences, observing and participating in activities with families and practitioners. The experiences I have had thus far with CDBS staff members have been eye opening and inspiring. The most moving was a MAPs meeting in Irvine (Orange County). CDBS staff members that I spoke with told me about Alexis and her family. They all lit up when they talked about Alexis, and about how wonderful Alexis and her family are. Looking back, I would describe the whole experience like my first time at an amusement park—it was full of surprises and unexpected moments.

I really had no idea what the MAPs process was prior to this meeting. After speaking with my professor and the facilitator of this MAPs meeting, Gloria, I had a better idea of what to expect. Typically, a family requests that CDBS staff facilitate MAPs meetings. The meetings are usually held in the family's home and the family invites relatives, friends, and other important people in the child's life. The attendees—together with the family—work to get through several major themes to ensure that the child has a reasonable and appropriate holistic plan for the future. It sounded simple and straightforward. I had facilitated similar meetings in the past, so I began to imagine what the experience would be like. In retrospect, except for accurately picturing our roles (Gloria facilitated, I wrote attendees' comments on chart paper, and my colleague typed all the notes on her laptop), every other element of the day was thrilling and awe-inspiring.

The following are some of the highlights of the MAPs process for Alexis:

- There was impressive attendance from a diverse group of people—family members, friends, and staff from current and past educational programs—all providing a variety of viewpoints.
- There was a good representation of people who had known Alexis all her life and also some who have more recently begun to work with her. Those individuals who had known Alexis longer were able to provide insightful comments of how far Alexis had come.
- There was a clear focus on the whole child (e.g., volunteerism, civic duty, nutrition, fitness, increasing independence).
- Several people at the meeting volunteered for specific activities and tasks with Alexis: take her to yoga; connect her with volunteer opportunities in the community; help her initiate and lead family activities; shop for birthday and Christmas gifts; buy groceries; identify possible jobs; develop job skills; increase computer literacy; update her Facebook page and practice social skills; invite her to various outdoor

activities (camping, walking, going to the beach, etc.); assist her to use public transportation; provide artistic and creative opportunities; and help create a calendar of meaningful activities.

- One of the school practitioners volunteered to train people who might interact with Alexis to know how to communicate with her.
- The mother of a boy who had accompanied Alexis to their school prom read her son's personal statement describing their experience at the prom. He wrote that he had learned the meaning of courage from Alexis because she was not afraid to go on stage and perform.
- It was great to learn about Alexis's life and all of her experiences in school (e.g., she was on her high school cheerleading squad).
- It was clear from the enthusiasm of the attendees and their willingness to be involved that they love and cherish Alexis.
- It was evident that Alexis is happy and that she is living a full and meaningful life surrounded by people who love and care about her tremendously.

As we headed home, I thought about the experience, and feelings from my own teaching experiences. I wish I could do MAPs for every child, but I can use MAPs questions as a guideline to direct my work with students and families in creating meaningful IEP and transition goals. I also felt good that we are doing a great job at my school in Oakland, which seems to have far fewer resources than other areas of the state. I realized that there are similar issues across race, class, geography, etc. Many of the comments made at the MAPs echoed the concerns about their children's futures expressed by the families of my students in the Bay Area. Overall, I was thankful for the experience. I learned a great deal, and felt humbled, inspired, and rejuvenated.