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By Gwen Chesterfield, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis SITE Program Coordinator

As Brent approached his 18th birthday, his routine consisted of coming to school, eating breakfast and lunch, and wandering around the campus the rest of the day. He was hard to track down outside of school, staying at either his mom's house or his dad's house. Brent's teachers described him as unmotivated, often truant, disruptive in class, and possibly depressed.

A high school job coach brought Brent to the attention of a program at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) called SITE. This is a two-year college campus- and community-based transition program. When SITE staff first met Brent, he wasn't communicative and was in the process of being expelled from high school due to non-compliance and truancy. He could not or did not articulate much of anything, including his frustrations and concerns. Program staff found him at his dad's house and met with him to offer him the opportunity to participate in SITE, encouraging him to join up before he got expelled from school. Brent agreed. He was told that he could only miss two days of school at IUPUI—and as it turns out, he never missed a day.

Brent's confidence was low at the beginning of his SITE experience. "Oh, I don't know about that" was a pretty common observation from him, reflecting his insecurities and doubts. These were especially strong when it came to anything involving literacy. To address this, SITE staff established a relationship that was more listening and asking than telling Brent what to do. As a result, he began talking more openly, expressing a strong interest in tools and mechanical aptitude.

Brent told SITE staff that he operated two small



businesses, mowing grass and fixing up and selling bicycles. Building on his strengths, Brent got a one-month time job trial at a lawnmower shop. Despite the owner initially saying he would not be able to offer a paid position, Brent was hired part-time as a result of his performance. During his tenure at IUPUI, Brent completed several work experiences that capitalized on his keen interests and talents. Not surprisingly, he blossomed, and his mental health and attitude in general improved.

Brent responded very positively to the adult atmosphere of the college campus. People were there because they wanted to be and were busy following their own individual schedules of classes, campus activities, and social lives. In this friendly and responsible atmosphere, Brent was supported by mentors his own age to interact with others and pursue shared interests. He, in turn, assumed a leadership role with the other students. For example, Brent recognized restaurant logos on coupons in the

newspaper and began cutting them out and bringing them in to share with his friends. Though unable to read the coupons, he masterminded pooling their money together, using a coupon, and getting a much better lunch within all their budgets.

Brent learned to navigate the urban campus and the city and expanded his knowledge of the city bus system. He took the city bus or rode his bicycle to campus every day. Despite his challenges with literacy, he began to learn how to use a cell phone and computer. He learned to send and read text messages, email, search the Internet effectively, and use Facebook to stay connected with the people important to him.

Brent also became the go-to person for his friends as they made plans for social activities off-campus, which could be challenging due to city bus routes. He was respected as a great idea person, someone good at figuring out details and problem-solving unforeseen glitches. He would tell his friends not to worry—they would figure it out. And with his help, they did.

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Brent made some very good friends and developed a strong sense of self-confidence and a willingness to tackle new experiences. While on campus, Brent expressed an interest in seeing a dentist to treat his dental issues. Demonstrating his commitment to change, Brent independently followed through on more than a dozen major dental procedures at the Indiana University

Dental School Clinic, sometimes twice a week, with outstanding results: a winning smile. This contributed greatly to Brent's increased self-confidence.

Now 21, Brent has moved out of his parents' homes, lives in his own apartment, and is employed full-time at a local manufacturing plant.

He keeps in touch with his many friends via visits, phone calls, texts, and Facebook messages. We often see Brent downtown, and he stops by campus twice a year to visit. College life allowed this formerly turned-off and unhappy young man to transform himself into a friendly, articulate, self-assured, and happy person.

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