

## Include your child in program communications

By Sarah Bodily, MS  
*Program Director*

As adults, we often have to have tough conversations or make hard decisions. There is no exception for adults with disabilities; they are expected to have hard conversations as well. One of the goals of Aggies Elevated is to raise expectations in all areas of life. That includes the conversations we have with students, parents, and other important stakeholders.

In my time as a special education teacher, I often saw parents exclude their child from conversations for many reasons: “He’s not old enough to understand,” or “I know what he needs better than he does,” or “She doesn’t know she has a disability, so we’ll just do this without her,” or “I will always be there for her so she doesn’t need to make these decisions.”

In all of these situations, I have stated to parents how crucial it is to have students involved as early as possible in knowing about their disability. They need to know their limitations, their strengths, how they learn best, and the goals they are expected to work on. There is a reason students are required by law to attend their IEP meetings unless medically unable. The student should be central to all communications that happen. This is their education, their opportunity to learn about themselves, and learn to advocate for what they want.

I may be preaching to the choir now, because I think you, as parents of our Aggies Elevated students, recognize the importance of your young adult’s voice. They wouldn’t be where they are today without you allowing them to make choices and have a voice of their own. Your trust in their judgment is a crucial part of their success in the past and in the future.

In Aggies Elevated, we hold our students to the standard that they are responsible for decisions they make.

They are central to everything going on. We would like to encourage as we work together in fostering each student’s independence and adult behavior that our communication always includes the student. We encourage our mentors if they have discussions with parents that the items discussed are open for the student to discuss as well. We will not have secret conversations with parents about students.

If you disclose information to Aggies Elevated staff that you feel is not necessary to share with a student, we can identify that on a case-by-case basis. Otherwise, please know that conversations Aggies Elevated staff have with parents will be open to have with students as well. We want our students to know they are central to their own success and have a right to know what’s being discussed as it pertains to their education and future.

We want our communications to be a collaborative effort to support each student’s independence. You are an important player involved in this and we want to hear how things are going from your perspective. We always welcome feedback, and would love to hear if you have comments or concerns.

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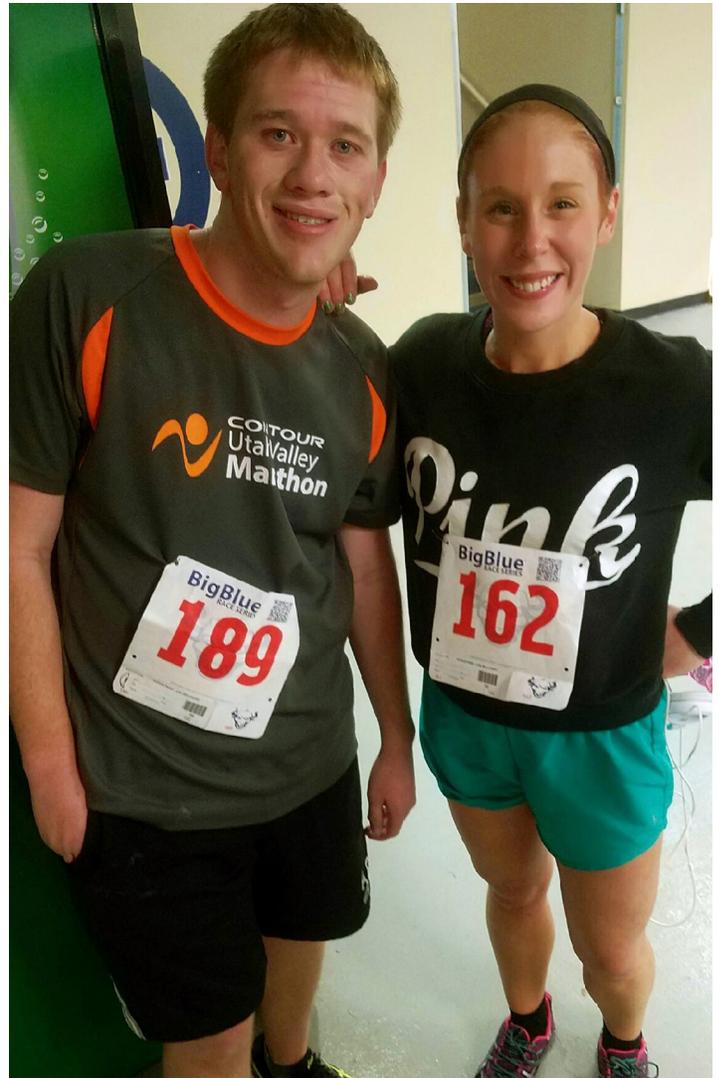
# Encouraging community engagement

By **Jeff Sheen, MSW**  
*Co-Principal Investigator*

This year, as part of the Independent Living Seminar, we have introduced a community engagement assignment. For this assignment, students are required to participate in four community-based (meaning off campus) activities each semester, such as a concert, play, movie, bowling, hiking, local fun run, corn maze, or any other community activity they can think of, with a group of friends they choose. For at least one of the activities we have asked the students to participate in the youth group hosted by Options for Independence, the local center for independent living. At the end of each activity, students write a one-page reflection paper by responding to the following questions:

1. What was the community event you chose to attend? Where was it located? Who did you go with?
2. What was one type of job you observed at this event? Did you see anyone working that was doing a job you might enjoy in the future? Why or why not?
3. What was one skill you needed to use to be part of this community event?
4. How will this skill help you to be more independent in the future?

There are several reasons we have included this assignment in your student's experience. First, we are hoping to encourage the students to engage with the larger community surrounding campus, so that they can become more aware of activities that they may want to participate once they leave our program. Second, we are hoping to encourage your student to continue making new friends by inviting students outside of the Aggies Elevated program to join them at these activities. Third, it provides students with practical opportunities to practice and refine decision-making, planning, communication, and other social skills. Fourth, by asking students to reflect on the types of jobs they see and skills they use during these community activities, we are reinforcing con-



Josh and Kayla participated in the Halloween 5K Fun Run.

cepts and skills they are learning in other classes to help them be prepared for finding meaningful and enjoyable employment after they graduate. Finally, we think it is important for our students to connect with the local center for independent living, as centers like Option can provide ongoing support for students after they graduate from Aggies Elevated. As your students come home for visits and the different holidays, and you are out having fun, we would encourage you to ask them similar types of questions to reinforce what they are learning...no paper required!

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# Utah Gov. Gary Herbert visits Aggies Elevated



Utah Gov. Gary Herbert visited two programs at Utah State University on Friday, Nov. 4: Aggies Elevated, which serves college-age adults with intellectual disabilities, and ASSERT (Autism Support Services: Education, Research and Training) which serves young children ages 3-5 on the autism spectrum. Herbert is pictured here with a group of Aggies Elevated students.

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## Parents can attend free Think College webinars

Think College, which is the national coordinating center for TPSID programs (including Aggies Elevated), sponsors webinars on a variety of topics related to postsecondary education for students with intellectual disability. Visit this link for a list of upcoming webinars: <http://www.thinkcollege.net/training/webinars>

Registration for these webinars is free. Registrants will be able to attend the session live, and will also re-

ceive a link to the webinar recording to listen to later.

Participants in these webinars will need a computer or other device that is connected to the internet, with speakers to access the audio. To hear a recording of a past webinar, click the Archived tab and select the recording of the webinar you are interested in. Many archived webinars also include related downloadable resources.

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## Local community engagement resources

**By Kayla Currier, BS**  
*Rehabilitation Counseling Intern*

Community engagement is an important aspect of every young person's life. What better way to make friends, relieve stress, create professional networks, learn, and become fully involved in the Logan community than to attend events both on and off campus? From overnight camping trips in Wyoming and tailgating at Utah State University football games to monthly book clubs at the Public Library, Logan has something to offer every Aggie.

A few favorite Aggies Elevated community integration resources

are listed below. These opportunities offer students and parents a low cost way to become involved.

### **Common Ground Outdoor Adventures**

A trip to Crystal Hot Springs, Saturday, Nov. 12, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Cost \$5.

<http://www.cgadventures.org/calendar.php>

### **Logan Library Event Calendar**

The Antics Improv Comedy Show, Every Friday night in November, 8:30 p.m. Cost \$6.

<http://library.loganutah.org/local/events/>

### **USU Campus Event Calendar**

Undergraduate Exhibition: Arts & Entertainment. Friday, Nov. 18, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. Free.

<https://www.usu.edu/calendar/>

### **USU Recreation**

Find the activity calendar at <http://www.usu.edu/campusrec/>

### **Options for Independence**

Find the activity calendar at <http://www.optionsind.org>

The best way to encourage your student to attend events is to go with them. Spend a day in the community with family and your student Aggie!