

Postsecondary Transition Companion Film:

Jamia and Peyton: I Can Work Discussion Guide



Jamia Davis, 15 (right), celebrates her completion of an “interest inventory” as part of her PROMISE plan. Renisha Rivers, a Connector for the Arkansas PROMISE project, works with Jamia to identify her strengths and challenges, connect her with a wide range of community and school resources, and facilitate summer employment opportunities.

In Fayetteville, Arkansas, and dozens of other communities across the country, the PROMISE federal demonstration project (sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the Social Security Administration) is enabling youth with disabilities like Jamia Davis and Peyton Denzer to obtain paid summer employment starting at age 14. PROMISE staff also work with the teens and their families to design pathways to long-term employment, and transition away from life-long dependence on social security benefits.

School-based Employment Supports

- Is it common for school and vocational rehabilitation counselors to collaborate? Who do you think is responsible for initiating the collaboration?

- Are there other common agency or organization partners who are, or could be, part of employment supports while students are in school?
- Why do you think the strategies used by Arkansas PROMISE to support career exploration and competitive employment are considered innovative?
- What strategies are you familiar with that support students with disabilities in their path to competitive, integrated employment?
- What strategies are you aware of to overcome some of the common barriers to partnership between schools and other agencies, like vocational rehabilitation?



**WATCH
NOW**

Click to
view *Jamia
and Peyton:
I Can Work*.

Finding a Career Path

“I want to go to like beauty school my junior year, so I can get that over with. And then in college I want to major in criminal justice.”

—Jamia Davis, 15, Fayetteville, AR

- If you are in the workforce, how did you decide on your career path?
- At one point, Peyton is encouraged to pursue jobs other than her stated goal of becoming a veterinarian. What do you think about this?
- Were you surprised to hear of Jamia’s interest in the criminal justice field? Why or why not?
- What supports have helped you on your career path?
- What supports are in place in your community or school to help ANY student identify a career path?
- What supports might Jamia or Peyton need to be successful on their career paths?

Family Participation

“(For) roughly 70 percent of the families who are participating, the Social Security benefit checks they receive for their youth is the primary source of income for that family. PROMISE works with at least one adult in the household to help that adult further their education, further their vocational aspirations.”

—Brent Williams, Arkansas PROMISE

- For families involved in the PROMISE program, what do you think they perceive as the benefits? What are the risks?
- How did your family help you prepare for life after high school?
- Do you think it might be more difficult for parents of children with disabilities to work, and/or to rise to greater levels of pay and responsibility in their profession? Why or why not?
- As a family member or a professional, what approaches to partnering with families are most effective?



Top: Jamia at her job at the Career Academy of Hair Design, Fayetteville, Arkansas. **Bottom:** Peyton Denzer, 17, and her mother Linda Denzer receive Social Security benefits counseling from David Robbins.

Preparing for Employment

“In the Job Club we emphasize things like cooperation and attendance and initiative... Soft skills for employment are probably the key to being successful.”

—Susan Daniel, Employment Developer

- Are there pros and cons to separate transition programs for students with and without disabilities?
- What changes would you imagine would need to be in place so that all students have access to high quality transition support?
- Jamia and Peyton are paid for their work experience. Do you think they should be paid? Why or why not?
- The film talks about “soft skills.” How do you define soft skills and how relevant do you think they are to employment?
- Where do you think are the best places to learn and practice “soft skills” and why?

Employer Perspectives

“In the beginning, I was not sure how it was gonna work out having someone with a disability or a challenge. She caught on right away. She was able to bathe and dry dogs herself by the end of the first day.”

—Jim Purdy, Owner, Dig my Dog

- Why do you think some employers are hesitant to hire people with disabilities?
- What do you think are the biggest factors contributing to the high rate of unemployment for people with disabilities?
- What are good strategies for engaging employers as solution partners to improve the employment rate of people with disabilities?
- Many employers indicate they are equipped to teach a new employee the technical skills of the job but say they cannot take the time to teach an individual how to be an employee (e.g., punctuality, manners, responsibility). What does this information mean for employment preparation?
- Are you aware of large or small employers in your community that have focused on diversifying their staff by focusing on hiring individuals with disabilities?
- Do words matter when communicating with potential employers? “Client” versus “intern” or “job seeker”? “Job placement” versus “career path”? “Consumer” versus “asset” or “employee”?

Making Assumptions

“People get judged by just what they look like. Or people get judged by what their disability is. They’re basically judging people



Jim Purdy, owner of Dig My Dog Kennel and Grooming in Springdale, Arkansas, gives instructions to his employee Peyton Denzer.

with disabilities just by their disability, without knowing their personality.”

—Peyton Denzer, 17, Springdale, AR

- When you first saw Renisha Rivers (the PROMISE “Connector”) roll out of her van in a wheelchair, did you think she was a professional serving students with disabilities?
- What makes Renisha good at her job?
- How do you think Jamia and Peyton are judged by others? Do you think this helps or hinders their employment options?
- What strategies do you use to keep your assumptions in check about people you perceive as different?
- What changes in schools and communities would help to create more positive assumptions about people who represent “difference”?
- What role can you play in helping to increase expectations and positive assumptions about people with disabilities?

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