

## Building Inclusive Higher Education Programs in Places Where They Don't Exist: A Series of Family Perspectives

August 2024

### About this Series

This profile is part of the series, *Building Inclusive Higher Education Programs in Places Where They Don't Exist: A Series of Family Perspectives*. The series introduces inclusive higher education (IHE), shares lessons learned, and presents the stories of parent leaders who helped create IHE programs in places where they didn't exist. Author **Elise McMillan, J.D.** is the retired former director of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) and was the founding faculty member of Next Steps at Vanderbilt University, the first IHE program in Tennessee. This spotlight highlights the work of parent leader, **Beth Foraker**.

### Beth Foraker

#### Introduction

Beth Foraker was one of the leaders in the creation of the IHE program at the University of California Davis (UC Davis), the Redwood Supported Education to Elevate Diversity (SEED) Scholars program.<sup>1</sup> Beth's son, Patrick Foraker, graduated from the George Mason LIFE Program. Patrick pursued a film and media program after finishing at Mason LIFE.



#### Why?

Beth Foraker, a parent and educator, began her road to building a four-year IHE program in California because she wanted an inclusive program for her student teachers. At the time, her son, Patrick who has Down syndrome, was fully included in K-12 Catholic schools. Beth worked at UC Davis as a university liaison supporting student teachers at area schools and leading a seminar on student teaching. When she started encouraging the university to start an IHE program, someone told her, "It's going to take a mom like you to get that done."

#### How?

Not to be discouraged, Foraker kept working with people with disabilities and families and looking for an opportunity to start California's first four-year program. The state has 21 programs, but most are two-year programs. Foraker shared, "In 2018, we knew the next round of TPSID [Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities] funding was coming, and we wanted to be prepared.<sup>2</sup> We wanted to share with others what was possible. We organized a

<sup>1</sup> The UC Davis SEED program, <https://redwoodseed.ucdavis.edu>, is a four-year inclusive residential college program for students with intellectual disability (ID).

<sup>2</sup> The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) includes a definition of a student with an intellectual disability (ID). Provisions of the HEOA including federal financial aid, Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Programs



seminar and invited more than 250 stakeholders. We brought in Dr. Erik Carter as the keynote speaker.<sup>3</sup> There was a lot of energy. We invited representatives of the UC system, school districts, regional centers, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), employers, and other existing programs, but we still weren't making progress."

Next, the UC Davis Chancellor invited anyone interested to contribute a "Big Idea" for the University. The ideas chosen would receive \$1 million in funding. "Because of my work at the university, I knew undergraduates who wanted to make inclusive higher education happen. I told them they are missing out if people with disabilities aren't included in their college experience. They went all over the college and shopped the idea. Everywhere they went people said yes, and we submitted the 'Big Idea' and got nowhere."

"Then in 2020, everything changed with the pandemic, collapses in higher education, racial reckoning, and I knew that the TPSID funding requests for proposals would be coming out in May," Foraker said. At this time, Patrick enrolled in the George Mason University LIFE Program in Virginia, since there was still no four-year program in California.

"We were able to use all the work that had been compiled for the 'Big Idea' – we had tilled the soil. In October 2020, we were awarded \$2.1 million, to start the UC Davis Redwood SEED Scholars Program. The program launched in August 2021 with 12 students. All the work that people with disabilities and families had been doing was finally aligning." Foraker said.

The Redwood SEED Scholars Program is a collaborative effort between the UC Davis Medical Investigation of Neurodevelopmental Disorders (MIND) Institute and the UC Davis campus Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Dr. Len Abbeduto, Director of the MIND Institute, agreed to be the principal investigator for the TPSID funding. "The DEI Director, Dr. Renetta Tull, had not heard of these inclusive programs, but her first job was in deaf education. She knew how important these programs are and agreed to help support the program," she said. Foraker notes that it is crucial to develop relationships and make alliances with decision-makers on college campuses.

The program works with VR and in the first year, the students have internships - both paid and unpaid - on campus. By their fourth year they are working for longer hours and more days and at a wider range of internship sites. The program is dedicated to having graduates be prepared for competitive, integrated employment.

---

(CTP), and Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) are specifically provided for students with ID. The term Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) is often used to describe students with both ID and another developmental disability (DD) or students with ID or another DD. Some of the alliances mentioned in this series are working to build programs and services for the broader category of students with IDD who in some cases may not have an ID.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Erik Carter is the Executive Director of the Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities, <https://bcdd.soe.baylor.edu/>, at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. His research and writing focus on principle-driven and research-based strategies for promoting full participation, relationships, and valued roles for children and adults with IDD.



## In Closing

Patrick graduated from the George Mason LIFE Program and moved back to California. Beth Foraker continues to direct the Redwood SEED Scholars Program. Foraker offers the following advice to others wanting to encourage colleges in their communities to start IHE programs.

### Advice from Beth Foraker

**Information sharing is key.** Foraker recommends making people with disabilities, their families, K-12 educators, and legislators aware of the benefits of IHE.

**Get other students at the college or university involved.** *“Just let the undergrads be microphones. Share the data with them. They are the customers and start getting them involved. This adds value to their college experience and there are better outcomes for everyone.”*

**Highlight the value of IHE to the institution and community.** Foraker thinks that more of the current Redwood SEED Scholars students will choose to live in Davis rather than return to their hometowns after graduation. *“We already know many of our current students plan to remain in Davis. This is where their jobs and community are.”* They will likely be involved as strong alumni of the program, and bringing these prospective students with disabilities into the community leads them to staying and becoming permanent residents and contributors.

