A couple of years ago I heard a parent of a child with disability talk about leaving school as “falling off a precipice” – all the predictability of school disappearing into the “abyss” of the unknown. Now I can’t pretend that I didn’t have the odd moment of panic in planning for my son’s life after school but I am here from the other side of the chasm to tell you that life after school can be rich and wonderful and not to fear the leap, but rather to get yourself ready for the adventure on the other side.

So this is really my story of how we went about – and still are – planning for a life of purpose for my son, Sean, who is now 20 and left school at the end of 2013.

I want to describe some of the thinking and actions we took, but it is not a template or a recipe. Our young people are unique and we need to honour that and figure things out from our knowledge of them. And, even though I am delighted by lots of what has happened for Sean in the past 18 months, this isn’t some effortless fairytale – there has been a lot of planning and preparation and there will continue to be many challenges and things to work out. The work is never really done as we seek new opportunities or build on what we have achieved.

But for now, we have established a satisfying routine of work, learning, fitness, socialising, and contributing to home and community – and it has been much simpler than I dreaded!

I am not naturally a planner … I am comfortable with a high degree of chaos and probably have felt like planning just tempts the gods to teach us that trying to exert control is a folly, but the end of school prompted us to get serious about the sort of adult life we wanted Sean to live and what we would need to put in place to make this a reality. It was a time when I realised that without quite a lot of thought and planning Sean would be at home too much doing not very much and that this wouldn’t be good for any of us. My great fear was that Sean would leave school and spend hours each day watching repeats of Neighbours – it was not a far-fetched fantasy. I feared he would be bored, unstimulated, isolated and that my own work would be threatened by the need to take charge of him.

We wanted Sean to enjoy a purposeful life – we wanted him to wake up feeling he had a reason to get out of bed – and we knew that this wasn’t just going to happen – that in fact it was up to us – his family and supporters – to make it happen. And given the deadline of graduation, we had to be clear where to invest our time and energy to make this good life happen.

Despite the moments of panic, Sean’s transition to life after school was made significantly easier because I was very clear about what I didn’t want.

I knew, for example, that I was not interested in dealing with services or professionals who began with “that’s not realistic”.

I knew that I didn’t want a life of separateness, marked by a special path – day services and sheltered workshops – reserved for people with a disability.
I knew that while Sean might need support, I didn’t want him to be defined by an identity of “disability service client”.

I knew that my precious son deserved more than crumbs of the disability service system – that he deserved an extraordinary life, the best possible life ... and that is what we set out to achieve for him.

Over a number of years, we had started to define what this best possible life should look like for Sean. We call this our vision.

Now the language of vision can seem a little obscure or airy fairy but I increasingly believe that we need to work at having real vision -- SEEING (really picturing) the future we want for our family member or the person with disability we are supporting to get a good life.

These quote remind us of the power of a vision:

- A dream is a compelling picture of a desirable future. Once invented by the imagination, it hovers over the person as a lure toward the future.
- A dream works like a rudder guiding you toward your chosen destination, keeping you “on course.”

So our vision is a lure – it attracts us to our destination, it beckons us, encourages us, inspires us to keep going forward. It is the rudder which keeps us from wavering off course – it helps us resist the low expectations of the disability world which threatens to divert us.

In Sean’s high school years, my husband Terry and I attended a weekend workshop run by Pave the Way and had the opportunity as a couple to really articulate our vision for Sean. We were also encouraged to record that vision – to write it down – and I learnt there is great power in writing things down.

This is what we wrote: Our dream for Sean is of a rich and meaningful life: opportunities to learn and contribute; embedded in a community where he is valued and appreciated. We want Sean to be connected within a web of relationships to people who will be more than bystanders in his life. We dream and trust that he will experience love, belonging, and a sense of himself as the precious individual that he is.

We use this vision to make decisions about Sean’s future – we also use this vision to enlist others to help us to move closer to that vision. We work at this vision being not just persuasive and powerful to us but also compelling to others.

Having this vision helps us to know what his life should look like:

- A real job and a good income
- A chance to keep learning, exploring and developing
- Regular – just like his sister and brother!
- Lots of friends and other relationships
- To be fit and healthy
- A home of his own
- A strong sense of self and making a contribution
- Holidays and adventure
It was very important to us that Sean would work after school, continue to learn, find ways to contribute to the community, maintain and extend friendships, and pursue his interests and passions. I need to say that his life is a work in progress – but we feel like we are heading in the right direction.

So before I go any further, let me introduce you to my gorgeous son, Sean. Sean is our second child – a middle child, unlikely to be overlooked any time soon.

He is a funny, generous, enthusiastic and outgoing young man who engages life with a vigour and attitude that shakes us all up. He is empathetic and loves to be helpful. Despite his intellectual disability, he is smart, competent in many things and frequently very astute. He is the ultimate party animal, our family social convenor and holiday planner, and he is the peacemaker who encourages us to kiss and make-up, though often this takes the form of telling his father, “your fault … apologise to Mum”, which is working quite well for me!!

He has a great spirit and greets you with such warmth that you feel like the most important person on the planet. Our family is richer for his presence.

This is not to say that he doesn’t also have significant needs. Along with Down syndrome, he has a significant hearing loss, and his speech is greatly impacted. While we don’t often dwell on the impact of his impairment, I don’t want to mislead you to think Sean is more capable than he is. We have, however, always stubbornly resisted a view that his life prospects should be determined by his presumed IQ.

We have tried to root him firmly in the typical, ordinary world as much as possible. Sean completed his primary schooling at a little Catholic school a couple of blocks from our home – and then he completed high school at a large all boys’ school of over 1400 students in walking distance of our home.

He was always active – swimming club, playing soccer, learning circus skills etc. and he was a full participant in the rituals of school – assemblies, school concerts, school sports days, walkathon and his favourite was undoubtedly school camp, but he endured some hard times, lonely times, times when he faced exclusion and rejection. He is a survivor.

Despite the hard times, Sean left school with a strong sense of himself and a sense of where he belongs in the world. He made good friends and left school having had many wonderful opportunities to explore his interests and passions and with high aspirations for his future. I couldn’t have been prouder than at his graduation when he walked across the stage and then stood amongst his classmates with such dignity and maturity. He walked amongst his classmates shaking their hand, congratulating them, and then embraced the closest of his friends in a big bear hug. He was an enthusiastic participant in singing the school song and warcry which was conducted on the oval in pouring rain just to add to the atmosphere!

He attended the late night post-graduation party and then travelled to Schoolies where he – attended the beach parties, drank beer in his friends in their apartments and relished being part of the Schoolies experience. And I could mostly relax – he had a safety net – staying in an apartment with some support from a young male worker and then his sister and other friends, and he was “legal’ bring almost 19.
I can hardly believe that it is more than 18 months since graduation.

I always knew that the end of school was likely to be quite an upheaval – a complete loss of structure and routine.

Despite my anxiety about “what next” I made the decision not to be driven by panic to try to fill a timetable for him. I made the decision instead to keep thinking of our vision, Sean’s gifts and interests and to try to see where we could match those gifts and interests to the roles which were central to our vision.

I often think that I approached the last months of school as a detective researching a case and exploring possibilities. I had my trusty notebook and folders filled with notes on our vision, what we saw as Sean’s gifts, possible roles. I also tried to notice opportunities – I read the local papers, scanned the city council websites, subscribed to free newsletters, spoke to lots of people. I made lots of phone calls and whenever I had an idea or heard of a possibility, I wrote it down for future reference.

To give us some breathing time, while we explored work and community roles, I looked at what Sean was currently doing that could continue after school and knew that some things – regular swimming, ju-jitsu, gym, youth group, some jobs around home and helping our neighbours – were things we would keep up as they would provide continuity.

As we started to think about life after school, I realised we couldn’t do it alone. I work almost full time and life is busy – leaving little time for reflection and planning.

I knew that at such a critical transition time, we couldn’t afford to just float along, so about 3 years ago we started a formal planning process by establishing a circle of support for Sean – a group of family and friends that came together about every 6-8 weeks to refine the vision for Sean and to think about concrete actions we could take to move closer to that vision, to share ideas and deal with any stumbling blocks.

So this little circle of people – our daughter, my brother and sister, some close friends and neighbours – helped us to create the momentum we needed to move forward. In our first meetings, we shared our vision and also heard from others what they saw as Sean’s gifts. At times, circle members helped in really practical ways – making phone calls, researching groups or sources of funding, even stepping in when support fell apart. Mostly I appreciated that they were a sounding board, generating ideas, challenging us to be clearer about what we were really seeking and helping us to set priorities when there was confusion or when doubts set in. They were also absolutely critical in scoping opportunities.

A major focus of our planning was reflecting on how Sean could get paid employment.

Over the last two years of school, we accessed funding through the My Future My Life program and he did work experience in a bakery, a tourist office, in a legal office, at Best and Less, and also within the organisation where he ultimately secured paid work.

The work experience was valuable in helping Sean understand the world of work in a concrete way. Sean’s work ethic was a bit hit and miss – I had to believe that this would develop as I couldn’t see someone paying Sean for a 10 minutes on half an hour off approach to work.
Work experience helped Sean get workplace expectations and it also helped us sort out what sort of work he might like. He wasn’t keen on the bakery job – too much washing up, and while we had thought he would love Best and Less because he is the neatest folder of clothes, we hadn’t realised that the role would be quite solitary – not social enough for him. The legal office which was originally his pick was successful for the long lunches he was able to enjoy with his Dad in town but less successful for the limited range of suitable tasks available in a small office.

We helped Sean to develop a CV and spent some time writing up Sean’s strengths and what he would bring to a workplace.

We also interviewed 3 separate employment services and selected one during the last months of year 12 as we were keen to get work established as soon as possible and signing up at school helped us avoid the Job Capacity Assessment process.

Sean started work in March last year. Sean works in his paid work 3 mornings a week. He is paid an award wage and enjoys generous conditions. His employer is a large community organisation in walking distance from home.

Sean’s current job was not advertised job or sourced through an employment agency – it was a job which was specifically designed for Sean because we kept our eye on this goal, and because a friend and member of our support circle was able to see a match between Sean’s skills and jobs which could be done in her workplace. He is a valued member of the Operations Team –a group of close to 20 workers who provide support to the rest of the organisation.

Sean goes off neatly dressed with his ID badge and swipe card – really he dresses more like he is aiming for CEO status than an operational support role.

He has learnt important administration skills (photocopying, laminating, shredding), shopping, and a range of other operational support roles. He is responsible for topping up supplies in the kitchens and bathrooms, and has a new job setting up meeting rooms for the board meetings once a month. On Thursdays he helps to cook and serve a BBQ for clients of the service.

There were a few hiccups early on (Sean checking his Facebook on his phone rather than working, but he now does most work independently and is learning to do things so quickly that his boss tells me proudly that she needs to find new and more challenging tasks for him. He has gone from having full-time support to a couple of hours on one day with plans to reduce that further.

This job could not be a better fit for Sean – it is a large organisation –a couple of hundred employees and always something happening. It is warm and welcoming and creative. He is always early for work – leaving with plenty of time to buy a double shot latte from the coffee van prior to clocking on. He has his own work email and he loves to access his work emails on his phone or iPad – and feels a great sense of belonging.

Sean is also extremely fortunate to work in an environment where he is both part of a defined team but also has opportunities to mix with a broad range of people.
Sean may not have great money skills but he looks forward to that fortnightly pay slip and he absolutely appreciates the other benefits of work, particularly having a good answer to that question of what are you doing now you’ve left school! He walks out the door with a real sense of purpose, looks forward to chats with his work colleagues, and recently explained to me that the “staff” shirt he was wearing at a work event was much better than the “volunteer” one he wore the year before at the same event.

Most wonderfully he is absolutely embraced by his co-workers. Recently his boss sent a text message saying simply: “Thanks for giving birth to Sean and bringing him into my life”.

While now it seems inevitable that Sean would enjoy a well-paid regular job in a mainstream setting, where people would appreciate his gifts and contributions, let me be very clear, not everyone shared my belief that Sean was employable.

At school, we were directed to sheltered workshop work experiences which we rejected. And, despite our rigour in selecting an employment service, we had distressing experiences early on with one individual from that service who had low expectations for Sean and who clearly conveyed to us that we were being unrealistic in thinking work was a realistic goal for him. She didn’t believe that Sean was employable and condescendingly told me I was “thinking like a mother” – code for deluded-thinking he could manage to work the required minimum 8 hours a week. My reply that I had known Sean for 19 years, and she had met him for 30 minutes fell on deaf ears. She was fixated on her Disability Support Pension application – telling us he never needed to work – but had not bothered to read any information provided by us, and I really felt that we were going to be wasting our time with someone who had no belief in Sean and no drive to get him working.

We were at that stage still negotiating with his current employer about the job offer, and we had counted on the on-site support being provided through the employment service, so I was highly anxious that this was going to be threatened by this particular employment consultant.

I was so disturbed by her attitude that I lodged a formal complaint and luckily the service, listened and quickly acted to address our concerns. We were allocated a new employment consultant who had a completely different approach and both David and subsequently a support worker, Viv, have been excellent—positive, solution focused and true partners.

So while I think there is much in the disability employment sector which needs to be improved, you can get the best out of this system and there are great people if you can just persist and find them. It was also true that we found being enrolled in the last months of school was helpful in avoiding delays and we didn’t need to have a job capacity assessment — and haven’t needed to because Sean is paid under award wages and not the supported wage.

We think Sean may just have the best job ever...

The first stages of Sean being in work we concentrate on him learning the skills he needed to be a good worker and team member, now our focus is also on how we can deepen the connections with his work mates.
In March next year, Sean will travel on holidays to Bali with 2 of his work colleagues and he is becoming more confident in making social arrangements with them outside work hours.

Now that this job is established and mindful that Sean is still young and will in all likelihood move through many jobs in his life (as other young people do), and should be working much more than 8 hours a week, we have been inspired to think about Sean taking a second job.

We have been reflecting again on his gifts and this has led us to explore Hospitality.

Earlier this year, Sean enrolled in the Cert 3 in Hospitality at TAFE. Many of you will be aware that there has been an enormous shake-up in TAFE over recent years and this course had its challenges for Sean – notably an ever-changing timetable which required constant monitoring and a juggle with work.

He completed almost all of the practical services and we used the course material for regular literacy practice and to reinforce the practical components. He did not undertake most of the written assessment – partly because the on-line mode did not suit him and also because the intensity of the workload – and the short term nature of the course did not suit his learning style. I would say, however, that he learnt SO much. He had the opportunity to do prac not just at TAFE but at two of the city hotels, and he is still very keen to practice all that he learnt around the home. He showed enormous stamina – juggling 6.30am starts and 9.30 pm finishes and a number of 12 hour days.

He also made some lovely connections with other students. I haven’t yet had the time to secure him a paid job, but we have started the process of approaching local businesses for more work experience to add to his CV.

Investing in people

When we were planning Sean’s life after school one of my greatest fears was that Sean could be isolated and lack contact with young people. This continues to be a big fear so we have been quite intentional about trying to stay in touch with friends.

Part of our vision for Sean was that he would be connected within a web of relationships – the support circle is part of our web – people who have known Sean over time and really understand our vision for him. The other people we have invested in – are young people his own age.

Being included in local schools and community groups was always an important part of our vision for Sean, and I am now really able to see the fruits of ALL the relationships which Sean was able to build by being included in our local school and in local clubs and activities.

When Sean left school, we knew that we would need to keep tending those relationships – I never take friendships for granted and recognise the need to assist Sean to stay in touch with people and to be prepared to be the person who does a lot of the inviting.

What I know now is that there is a real knack in both noticing the people who are open and inviting those people closer into the circle.

Sean has been fortunate to hold onto some very good friends from his primary school days – but it is not just luck … we were also very intentional in trying to nurture those relationships
- hosting parties, BBQs, being a thoughtful friend at birthdays or other significant occasions, and now staying in touch by phone or Facebook.

I learnt over time to become better at noticing the people who are open to Sean’s gifts — and I also learnt that we need to get rid of self-defeating ideas like my son can’t make friends.

We are big party hosts .... For Sean’s 19th at the beginning of the 2014 year, we hosted a big BBQ with 50 of his high school and primary school friends. For his 20th Birthday, he also hosted a big get together at one of the local pubs, and now, of course, the count-down is on for his 21st.

A really important part of our thinking is that he has the right to have a regular 19 year old life – with all of the independence from us that that involves. It means we need to be prepared to “let go”.

Last year Sean became for a time a regular at the RE hotel on a Wednesday night – and even the casino on occasion. He has been to some pretty wild 18 birthday parties, nightclubbing in the Valley and we try to say “yes” to those invitations, even if they scare us – and then we try to sort out what support Sean needs to stay safe – whether that is just confirming what friends will be there and making sure we have phone numbers, or getting an older friend to be close-by if he needs help.

Dropping him off to see him line up with his ID for entrance to the pub to catch up with his friends and hundreds of other school leavers feels so ordinary – and yes a little terrifying! This was particularly so on the night he turned his phone off and refused to come out at the agreed pick-up time. Despite our worry, he has always had a positive experience until a month or so back when he noted he came home less enthusiastic than usual – we finally got it out of him that the pub had been so crowded (end of semester celebrations) that he hadn’t managed to push himself forward to buy a beer – a tragic event indeed.

He is becoming quite skilled at making independent arrangements and also at telling us about what social arrangements he is keen to pursue. It is true that many of these involve beer. A few months ago, he noted through Facebook that his sister was attending the university law ball. He told her that he wanted to go too and so she bought him a ticket and he dusted off his formal suit and had a fabulous night – as well as spending time with Milly and her friends, he ran across old school friends and other people he knew – it was another example of the power of the web.

Luckily not all Sean’s social life revolves around drinking. In the last couple of years of school, Sean started attending a church youth group. One of the principles of community connections that I heard about many years ago was the idea of noticing the “sweet spots” in community and this is one of those spots identified not by us but by one of our circle members. It would have been easy to dismiss the idea – we are not from that Parish, indeed not that denomination, and I had a view that Sean would be bored by biblical discussion. It felt like we might be outsiders, and I had seeds of doubt about whether Sean would be accepted, however, our first meeting with the group showed that this was a group of young people who were open, welcoming and that yes while there was some serious
conversation, there were also lots of physical games, and socials (movies, dinners, swimming parties, bonfires) that Sean enjoyed.

The regularity of youth group – every Sunday night – with other social events on most Friday nights – provided us with some of the structure and continuity we sought. Importantly this “sweet spot” also provided us with people who “got” our vision for Sean and were also thinking about ways to expand on Sean’s role.

The youth group leaders had noticed Sean’s gift for two things – greeting people and hospitality and wondered if Sean would like to be an official assistant to the Sunday sessions and also if he would like to host the senior discussions in our home once a fortnight. So Sean shops, cooks, and sets up a meeting space and afternoon tea. He makes cordial and cups of tea, setting up glasses and plates. One of the leaders became a support worker for Sean and has been intentional in helping Sean to connect and to invite young people to hang out, for example, movie catch-ups over the holidays.

WE have absolutely found that when we share the vision, others join us in scoping opportunities. One of his support workers thought Sean might like to join her as a volunteer at the local vege co-op,

Another has enlisted Sean to volunteer at a fundraising event she runs, and

Last year the mother of Sean’s close friend who explained that the gang had also been thinking about this and wondered if Sean would like to have a role with the local rugby club where many of the boys still play.

So last year, Sean attended games and ran the water for the rugby team (as he had during his high school years). It was a great way to have regular contact with old school friends.

I can’t tell you how wonderful it is to know that others – his workers, his friends AND their parents – are also thinking and planning for Sean.

Holding onto relationships becomes easier when we are able to build local community connections – and the intersecting relationships provide a safety net for him.

We have been fortunate to live in the same geographical community for almost 30 years and Sean is well-known and regarded in that community, and almost every day I am conscious of the value in creating the web of relationships we desire. Sean is known not for his disability but as a school friend, a gym goer, a swim squad member, a youth group member and more.

At the gym, he comes across school friends, work mates and people who have known him over the years. He is motivated to go because of these connections. Similarly despite not particularly being a morning person, he will set his alarm for 6am to swim alongside his lifelong school friends who go toe the same squad session.

We have found that by us prioritising the local ordinary community spaces, we have been pretty successful in building the web of connections we sought for Sean.

Making support count: Avoiding empty calories and Building skills:
We do have some Support for School Leavers Funding which we self-direct through a host provider agency so we have a team of 4 workers – who work an average of 4 hours a week each. We have advertised and selected those workers and trained them in how their role is to contribute to the broader vision we hold for Sean. There is sometimes a view that group support is more cost-effective but we have found individualised support very cost-effective – all the time is directed to Sean and his goals.

I have a mantra with the support workers. Their role is to support Sean to do 2 things – build skills and build relationships in community. It is not their role to entertain Sean or keep him busy, to take him to the movies or just “hang out”. They are not there to be Sean’s friend but to help him to hold onto friends and make new connections. David Wetherow talks of many people’s support being the equivalent of “empty calories” – support which is lacking in any nutritional value – it is the support which passes time or fills a slot in a timetable but doesn’t build a life.

The support is to be active, and contributing to the broader vision. It is about him growing into the adult roles he inhabits and scoping further opportunities for him to belong to and contribute to his local community. They assist Sean to travel to Uni to have lunch with friends, they help him with literacy, with his fitness, and with participating and connecting.

There can be a great focus in later years on “life skills” but I have never been a great fan of using the precious school years on life skills at the expense of academics. We now have plenty of time to practise skills which we know Sean was ready for but just didn’t have the time to focus on.

Sean has also been relishing his adult role in terms of taking more responsibility at home. He has been proudly taking care of most of the washing – hanging it out, neatly folding and putting it away – and with the help of a support worker he has been cooking one meal a week. He proudly sets the table, and often texts me photos of the meal in progress just to whet my appetite. He thinks he is on Masterchef!!

Prior to finishing school, Sean didn’t have much exposure to public transport as he walked to and from school. Suddenly he has learnt to catch the bus on his own (only a couple of routes so far) and is also walking independently from Southbank to our home and from the city to South Brisbane. He has learnt to use his ATM card, and has become much more confident with shopping and ordering food in restaurants.

We are working towards Sean having both the skills and the social networks which would support him to live happily away from home. He is VERY keen – for years he has told us that our house is too old for him, and he talks often about moving out with a friend. He will definitely need a second or even third job – maybe even a substantial lotto win – to afford the luxury apartment that he sees in his future.

So what does his life look like now?

Sean is a worker, a team member and colleague.

He is a volunteer.

He is a youth group assistant and senior youth group meeting host.
He is a swimming squad member, a gym member, a ju-jitsu practitioner and a sometime hip-hop dancer. He is a rugby follower and social Frisbee player.

He is a vege co-op member and volunteer
He is cyclist and fundraiser
He is a shopper, home cook and takes responsibility for the family laundry.
He is a friend, a party-goer and nightclubber
He is a good neighbour,
He is a student.
He is a camper and traveller
He is an instgrammer and Facebooker.
He is a son, brother, nephew, grandson, cousin, and god-father.
He has established and built upon a regular presence in our local community.
He is still an avid Neighbours fan – but his many other roles give him purpose, status, connections and relationships.

His post-school life is still very new and a work in progress, but I think we have managed to do some things which have set him up for success. These are

- Knowing Sean’s gifts – the more we are able to be his cheer-squad, the more we find others who are also ambassadors for him.

- Knowing what we want and looking for opportunities that move us closer to the vision. This sometimes requires courage. Turning up to ANY new club or activity has required us to have the resolve and belief that Sean deserves to be in the real world. Sean has the right to an ordinary young adult life ... this requires us to go outside our comfort zone and to let go the reins. The “first times” – finding his own way home from a new place, taking the bus, hitting the pub with his friends – have all been a bit terrifying.

- Noticing who is open and not leaving relationships to chance: We have learnt that friendships are precious and not to be neglected! We work hard at encouraging Sean to stay in touch with friends and at initiating invitations. Again we need to have the courage to reach out.

- Knowing Sean’s gifts and gathering people who can keep the vision strong Perhaps the most critical ingredient of all the positive energy we bring to planning Sean’s transition from school is that we continue to surround ourselves with people who appreciate Sean’s gifts, who are positive about the future -- and who nurture our imagination of what is possible.
Now instead of feeling we have a “void” to fill, I keep thinking there are not enough days in the week to fit it all in! Sean’s vision for himself is to move out of home and to marry – he dreams of exciting holidays, parties, and new adventures.

I strongly expect that Sean will continue to expand OUR vision – shaking us up and stripping away the doubts which can at times still limit our imaginations.

What I have learnt is that there are no short-cuts ... as the theme of this conference tells us we need to “Think, Prepare, Plan”

But I want to leave with some starting points:

Think about: who are the people? Who can help you to keep moving forward? Who do you need to keep nurturing connections?

Where are the “sweet places” where your family member can be valued, connected and make a contribution?

What other possibilities do you need to keep exploring – how can you explore passions and interests?

Audre Lorde has said: *When I dare to be powerful – to use my strength in the service of my vision – then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.*

To have high expectations is to risk disappointment, to expect welcome and acceptance is to risk rejection.

On some days this may be our reality, but EVERY day, my beautiful son teaches me to be strong, to be brave, to be determined, and to go into the world with a big smile and an open heart

I wish all young people and their parents well as they take the leap into the future.

May you find the people and places where you are warmly embraced and appreciated.

May you find purpose in your days and keep seeing new and exciting possibilities ahead.

May your life after school be a wonderful adventure. Good Luck!