

Improving Transition Outcomes

An Innovative State Alignment Grant for Improving Transition Outcomes
for Youth with Disabilities Through the Use of Intermediaries

Resource Mapping Workshops 2003-2004



Executive Summary

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, a Division of the State of Iowa Department of Education, in partnership with six other state agencies, applied for and was awarded funding for "Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities Through the Use of Intermediaries." This Innovative State Alignment Grant is funded by the Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. For clarity and brevity, the Iowa team chose to use "Improving Transition Outcomes" as the project name, thus providing the acronym ITO. Grant funding began October 1, 2003 with the possibility of renewal for five years.

A Governance Group of seven state agencies established in 1999 to expand employment opportunities for persons with disabilities provided the solid foundation of partnership and commitment to cross-agency collaboration necessary to address and improve transition for youth with disabilities ages 14-24. These seven partner agencies are: Department for the Blind; Department of Education; Department of Human Rights, Division of Persons with Disabilities; Department of Human Services; Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Governor's Developmental Disabilities Council and Iowa Workforce Development.

The project goal is to "Create a community-wide system of inclusion, support and engagement for youth with disabilities as they transition into their adult roles in the community." The four objectives are 1) Conduct Resource Mapping, 2) Develop, implement and evaluate a cross-agency, multi-year State Plan for Transition, 3) Conduct local demonstration projects and 4) Demonstrate concrete evidence of sustainability.

To achieve the four objectives, the State of Iowa chose to continue the previously successful approach of supporting local communities in implementing promising strategies. The ITO state team immediately began work on developing a method of providing technical assistance on Resource Mapping. Various mapping methods were explored. The team consistently preferred The Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD) approach for Iowa. This asset-based approach of building upon the existing local

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community foundation, identifying and linking community resources in the effort to minimize duplicative efforts, address gaps and needed services, was patterned on the work of the Institute for Policy Research of Northwestern University, specifically the work of John Kretzmann and John McKnight.



Research yielded several Iowans trained in the ABCD Resource Mapping approach. Among them an experienced Resource Mapping trainer, Lois Smidt, Executive Director of Beyond Welfare in Ames, Iowa. ITO contracted with Ms. Smidt to facilitate five workshops on Resource Mapping in various locations across the state. From December 2003 to February 2004, ITO sponsored Resource Mapping workshops in southwest, southeast, western, eastern and central Iowa. Attendance ranged from 19 to 45 at each workshop with a mix of education, human services, state agency, non-profit and a few youth representatives in attendance.

Participants were asked to evaluate the workshop by listing “the three most useful things you learned” and “how I will apply these to my work.” Responses to “the 3 most useful things I learned” included:

“the idea of empower not just serve,”

“suggestions to improve collaboration; the importance of relationship” and

“concrete steps for proceeding with local team development.”

In response to “how I will apply these to my work,” many commented that they would:

“share with co-workers,”

“utilize resources within the community” and

“look to students for gifts and ideas.”

Participants were also asked to “describe anything that could have been more useful and why.” Responses consistently indicated frustration with the fluid nature of Resource Mapping and the lack of a definitive format for conducting and documenting Resource Mapping. The continual cycle of change that necessitates a “never-ending” approach to Resource Mapping, appeared to overwhelm some and energize others.

The State of Iowa Improving Transition Outcomes goal is to create the opportunity for community connections that provide healthy sharing, learning, recreation, goal-setting and problem-solving, not only for youth with disabilities but for all youth. Effective Resource Mapping, continually updated and formatted to fit the needs of the community, is one important benchmark toward accomplishing that goal.