

# Improving Transition Outcomes

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

## MyTransitionIowa.org

A Governance Group of state agencies, collaborating to improve employment outcomes for Iowans with disabilities, received grant funding from the Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities through the use of local intermediaries. Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS), the lead agency, and Governance Group partners the Department for the Blind, Department of Education, Department of Human Rights Division of Persons with Disabilities, Department of Human Services, Governor's Developmental Disabilities Council and Iowa Workforce Development monitor this effort.

Four mandatory objectives drive grant work: 1) developing a State Transition Plan, 2) conducting statewide Resource Mapping, 3) sponsoring local demonstrations and 4) sustaining these accomplishments. All project work is conducted within the five Guideposts for Success defined by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability: 1) school-based preparatory experiences, 2) career preparation and work-based learning experiences, 3) youth development and leadership, 4) connecting activities, and 5) family involvement and supports. Work on the Resource Mapping objective yielded MyTransitionIowa.org.

The ITO team recognized the abundance of existing resource guides with information on state and community level programs and services for youth with disabilities. A comprehensive guide specifically for youth with disabilities and family members providing information on informal resources and facilitating peer connections did not exist. Thus, the ITO team chose to develop the Resource Map around Guideposts 3, 4, and 5. An Advisory Group of parents, professionals, and service providers met regularly to brainstorm format, content, dissemination and sustainability of the Resource Map.

A web-based format was chosen with the caveat that not all youth and family members have web access in their homes; alternate methods of obtaining the information must be available. Youth input on this issue was gathered via focus groups and feedback was divided. Some preferred to locate information on their own while others wanted a personal contact. This second group told us that librarians and educators should be aware of and assist with accessing the Resource Map. They also told us that a telephone resource would be nice.

After multiple trial-and-error approaches to accomplishing the goal of providing an accessible Resource Map focused on leadership, basic transition resources, and peer connections these specifics were identified:

Format	Web-based with dissemination to increase awareness
Content	Transition Checklists and leadership opportunities
Dissemination	Promote statewide
Sustainability	Through one or more of the leadership opportunities

Iowa Department  
for the Blind

Iowa Department  
of Education

Iowa Department  
of Human Services

Iowa Division  
of Persons with  
Disabilities

Iowa Vocational  
Rehabilitation  
Services

Iowa Governor's  
Developmental  
Disabilities Council

Iowa Workforce  
Development

Guided by these specifics, the Advisory Group identified basic resources and leadership opportunities specifically for youth with disabilities and family members. The goal of facilitating peer connections would be achieved by youth and family members exploring and following-up on the opportunities and resources. Youth and family members establish connections by contacting the leadership opportunities and have the opportunity to strengthen those connections and/or pursue leadership roles through active participation. In this way the youth and family members create their own, unique and individual, Resource Maps populated with peers rather than service providers.

Partners saw development of MyTransitionIowa.org as a win-win situation for all involved. The leadership opportunities were struggling to increase awareness and participation. Despite seeking statewide participation, too often they found their membership was geographically clustered. Youth and families were sporadically learning about them through peer networks, educators or service providers. This website provided a way for youth and family members to independently locate and explore the various leadership opportunities.

From the very first Resource Map Advisory Group meeting, members stressed the importance of promoting the completed product. The Resource Map would be only as good as it's applicability to and use by the target audience of youth with disabilities and family members. Despite best efforts, the customary method of dissemination through educators and service providers is not enough.

Responding to this directive, Improving Transition Outcomes budgeted for marketing. A campaign featuring youth and family Success Stories and radio advertising was selected. Print, electronic and radio advertising direct youth, family members and others to explore MyTransitionIowa.org to find "connections with others just like you." The marketing campaign has received ecstatic praise.

This collaborative approach to Resource Mapping and marketing yielded more than a useful product. Sustainability of MyTransitionIowa.org by the partners themselves is assured due to the simplicity of the website and the positive impact on their bottom line.

Replication of the Resource Map and subsequent marketing promotion is encouraged; replication tools are under production.

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# TRANSITIONS

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