

# THE IOWA YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM (YLF) ALUMNI SURVEY MEASURING SUCCESS ONE STUDENT AT A TIME

## BACKGROUND

Iowa Improving Transition Outcomes (ITO) is a project to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities through the use of intermediaries. ITO is funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy of the U.S. Department of Labor and administered by Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, a Division of the Department of Education.

A Governance Group of seven state agencies established in 1999 to expand employment opportunities for persons with disabilities provides the solid foundation of partnership and commitment to cross-agency collaboration necessary to address and improve transition for youth with disabilities. 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.

ITO identified Iowa Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) as an intermediary to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. Since 1999, the Division of Persons with Disabilities (DPWD), a division of Iowa Department of Human Rights, has annually provided a YLF focused on transition for students with disabilities. Youth participants are selected in accordance with the YLF goals of:

- ◆ Employed and self-sufficient;
- ◆ Knowledgeable about available resources; and
- ◆ Connected to role models with disabilities.

This five-day leadership training program provides opportunities to at least 30 high school students to:

- ◆ Learn the history of and how to self-advocate using the ADA;
- ◆ Discover the culture of disability;
- ◆ Experience assistive technology designed to enhance independence;
- ◆ Identify barriers to personal and professional success; and
- ◆ Develop a "Personal Leadership Plan" to overcome identified barriers.

ITO staff initiated discussion with Iowa YLF Program Director Mike Williams on the value of a follow-up survey with YLF alumni in regard to education, employment, civic involvement, personal leadership plans, mentoring relationships, and use of YLF resources and tools.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

The follow-up survey with YLF alumni from 1999 through 2003 was developed in the spring, conducted in the summer, and completed in the fall of 2004. It was distributed electronically and interns followed up via telephone contact, e-mail, and U.S. mail. ITO provided funding for follow up and data entry; DPWD provided facilities and supervision of the interns. Cyndi Chen, Data Analyst with ITO, developed the survey, provided technical support, and analyzed survey results.

*"Now I can accept my disability. I don't see it as a disability. I see people with disabilities actually have a bigger gift than people without disabilities. You can think deeper because you have more struggles in your life. You can actually hit your dreams even more..."*

**Andrew**

## HIGHLIGHTS OF SURVEY RESULTS

- ◆ 78% - Survey return rate. 105 of the 135 surveys distributed were returned.
- ◆ 32% - YLF alumni returned as staff.
- ◆ 97% - Indicated the YLF experience was important to them.
- ◆ 67% - Identified their disabilities as mild.
- ◆ 47% - Living independently.
- ◆ 51% - Vocational rehabilitation services clients.
- ◆ 63% - Obtained college degrees or were still enrolled in college. (National Center for Educational Statistics: nationally 53% for students with disabilities and 64% for those without disabilities)
- ◆ 29% - Had mentors. 26% - Mentored others.
- ◆ 40% - Encountered discrimination because of disability.
- ◆ 24% - Identified transportation as the #1 barrier to active participation. Solutions for transportation problems included:
  - ☐ Affordable, reliable public transportation system with longer hours
  - ☐ Getting a van with extensive adaptation that can hold an electric wheelchair
  - ☐ Overcoming fear of learning how to drive and getting a driver's license
- ◆ 17% - Not participating in any community or organization activities.
- ◆ 35% - Not employed. Reasons cited for not working included:
  - ☐ Can't find a job I can do well
  - ☐ Disability & health
  - ☐ Just lost a job
  - ☐ On the waiting list for vocational rehabilitation services
  - ☐ Transportation problems
- ◆ 7% of those working earned \$20,000 or more annually.
- ◆ 35% of those working received employment benefits.
- ◆ 82% of those working were satisfied with their jobs. Reasons cited for employment satisfaction included:
  - ☐ Being treated like everyone else
  - ☐ Convenient location
  - ☐ Good benefits, good job and good pay
  - ☐ Great work environment
  - ☐ It's challenging
- ◆ 22 – Mean age. 18 to 26 – Age range.
- ◆ Personal and career goals included:
  - ☐ Be really good at something
  - ☐ Be self sufficient
  - ☐ Get a job
  - ☐ Go to college
  - ☐ Have better money skills
  - ☐ Help others
  - ☐ Live and work independently
  - ☐ Volunteer
  - ☐ Work hard

*"If I learned one thing it was never judge a book by its cover. There are a lot of people here that should be given chances in the real world. They should go out and get them. They're good people. They deserve a chance."*

Thomas

*"I would like to say I had a great time this week. It was nice being around other people like me because back home I only have one friend who has ADD. It was nice to meet a couple others like me. Our group's the best and I had a great time making new friends."*

Marissa

Comparison with 2004 National Organization on Disability / Harris Survey	YLF (Age 18-26)	Harris Survey	
		With Disability	Without Disability
<b>Education</b>			
Earned a GED or high school diploma	96%	79%	89%
<b>Life</b>			
Satisfied with life thus far	96%	74%	93%
Quality of life – getting better	86%	43%	75%
Quality of life – getting worse	0%	41%	12%
Quality of life – no change	12%	11%	9%
The most important – Family	66%	62%	67%
The most important – Health	11%	31%	23%
The most important – Education	17%	3%	5%
The most important – Friends	18%	2%	2%
In good health	82%	45%	89%
<b>Employment</b>			
Prefer to work	88%	63%	42%
Employed	65%	35% (age 18-64)	78% (age 18-64)
<b>Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)</b>			
Know about the ADA	95%	63%	66%
The ADA makes life better (of those who knew about the ADA)	85%	30%	N/A
<b>Workforce Investment Act One-Stop Centers</b>			
Have heard of One-Stop Centers	70%	42%	41%
Have used a One-Stop Center (of those who heard of One-Stop centers)	47%	26%	22%
<b>Of Those Who Encountered Discrimination at Workplace Because of Disability</b>			
Denied accommodations	14%	21%	N/A
Denied health insurance	5%	4%	N/A
Denied other benefits	10%	6%	N/A
Given less responsibility	36%	14%	N/A
Paid less than others	31%	12%	N/A
Refused a job interview	19%	27%	N/A
Refused a job	21%	31%	N/A
Refused a promotion	5%	17%	N/A
Other discrimination	60%	25%	N/A
<b>Community and Social Life</b>			
Socialize with close friends, relatives or neighbors at least twice / month	85%	79%	89%
Go to a restaurant, movie or shopping center at least twice / month	57%	56%	73%
Go to a place of worship at least once / month	71%	49%	57%
Not fully participating in work, school, housework, etc. due to disability	48%	53%	N/A

Information And Tools Provided at YLF	Used	Helpful (Of those who used the information or tools)
Accessed Community Resources	87%	92%
Analyzed Strengths / Weakness	90%	98%
Established Support Network	77%	N/A
Developed Leadership Plan	57%	97%
Identified Community Resources	81%	93%
Learned About Career / Education Options	93%	93%
Learned About Disability Culture	84%	94%
Learned Ways to Make Positive Contribution	84%	95%
Explored Leadership Potential	85%	90%
Met Professionals with Disabilities	85%	93%
Participated in Community Life	70%	97%
Set Personal / Career Goals	88%	92%

## USE OF SURVEY RESULTS

Overall, the survey gave us a good look at how well Iowa YLF prepares students for transition. With their expanded knowledge of the ADA, strong desire and high expectation for employment, optimistic views towards themselves and their futures, close to 100% high school graduation rate, and strong inclination for secondary education, the YLF is a substantial tool towards successful transition to employment and education for youth with disabilities in Iowa. Currently Iowa YLF Alumni Survey is the model for developing a nationwide YLF annual alumni survey.

Lessons learned from the survey results:

- ◆ The Personal Leadership Plan needs to be emphasized even more. Alumni responses indicated that the leadership plan was most helpful 1-2 years after YLF when barriers and discrimination became more evident
- ◆ An emphasis should be placed on providing more information on apprenticeship programs, One-Stop centers, and the Occupational Information Network (O\*Net)

Beginning with the summer of 2004 Iowa DPWD expanded the YLF to College Leadership forum (CLF). For 20-30 college students with disabilities, CLF is an immersion weekend focused on the ADA, writing cover letters and resumes, and interviewing for a job the youth desires. The YLF and CLF are sponsored in partnership by Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Iowa Department for the Blind, Des Moines Area Community College, Iowa State University, and the Iowa Division of Persons with Disabilities.

*"I would like to say that even though everybody here with some form of disability you can do anything you want to as long as you try hard and speak up for what you need."*  
Andrew J.

If you have any questions regarding the article and survey, please contact Cyndi Chen, Data Analyst for Iowa Improving Transition Outcomes at [cyndi.chen@iowa.gov](mailto:cyndi.chen@iowa.gov) or 515-281-0261.

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