

Improving Transition Outcomes

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

Improving Transition Outcomes with Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services A State of Iowa Governance Group grant project

In July 2003 the State of Iowa pursued U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy grant funds for Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities Through the Use of Intermediaries. One of eight states awarded funding, Iowa proposed to create a community-wide system of inclusion, support, and engagement for youth with disabilities as they transitioned into their adult roles. Along with other grant activities, three local communities were awarded grant funds to implement interventions specific to accomplishing this goal.

All local demonstrations were expected to implement, perfect, and sustain a replicable model, a prototype, for improving transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. Identifying the local demonstrations as prototypes rather than pilots, programs, or projects, came to us from Mr. Paul DiLorenzo, a consultant with National Center on Workforce and Disability -Youth. Webster's Dictionary defines prototype as "an original model on which something is patterned." Embodying the true spirit of the word prototype, all local communities were expected meet this standard for replication.

The State of Iowa Governance Group firmly believes in the value of local communities demonstrating "this is the solution" and then utilizing those lessons learned in policy development. While parameters for grant work by local Improving Transition Outcomes demonstrations were established by the state partners, more importantly the strategies and interventions tested were identified or developed by the local teams.

Criteria upon which communities were selected included: evidence of collaboration and shared responsibility, engagement of youth, innovative nature of proposed strategies, anticipated impact, and the capacity to sustain critical accomplishments. One significant difference from customary grant proposals was the requisite partner letters. Traditional letters of support were not sufficient. Applicants were required to submit letters of commitment by key team members specifying their responsibilities and how they would fulfill them. Additionally, we stressed the importance of connecting with youth, families, and the community.

Three local communities were awarded grant funding. The lead intermediary for each community was unique and added another dimension to our research.

- Henry County Extension lead the effort
- Council Bluffs Community College One-Stop workforce office lead the effort
- Hope Haven, Inc, a local community rehabilitation program was the principal leader with West Sioux School as co-leader

All three communities implemented interventions specific to their needs and within the scope of their partnership. We are most happy to share with you Replication Templates from our three local community prototypes and encourage you to replicate their work.

Governance Group

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Henry County Transition Partners worked on establishing a solid foundation. They gathered information from youth and families on “what did and didn’t” facilitate transition. Knowing that an unsuccessful transition directly impacts the entire community, they invited the community to a Stakeholders meeting. Attendees included parents, businesses, agencies, services providers, and educators. At the meeting they shared the focus group information in the context of “This is what we found. What should we do about it?” This meeting was critical because it generated community ownership. The community directed development of a Multi-County Resource Directory, Transition Planning Guidebook, Parent Support Group, Transition Resource Team meetings, and additional Stakeholders meetings. These critical Transition Partners accomplishments are sustaining.

If your community does not have a solid history of collaborative partnership specific to the issue you wish to address, we strongly suggest that you start at square one as they did. It is essential that team members trust one another and openly collaborate, as Transition Partners learned. Although all team partners were invested in providing quality youth services, they had individual priorities and agendas. Despite everyone voicing that they wanted to work together, little had been done to realize that goal. They defined this phenomenon as “talking about it but doing little of it” and named it “confused collaboration.”

Planning for sustainability
is crucial to survival

Does your community have a solid history of collaborative partnership? One method of measuring partnership is by the language used by the team. Do they share success? Do they use “we” rather than “I” language? Will the team remain a cohesive unit focused on the goal despite personnel changes among the partners? If your community team is indeed a collaborative partnership, consider implementing E-Mentoring or the CASE curriculum and their vocational exploration components.

Council Bluffs Youth Connections team members identified E-Mentoring and vocational exploration activities as the intervention best suited to their community needs. Youth in six high schools and local businesses participated in this initiative. Community connections and increased knowledge of available services are among the outcomes. E-Mentoring sustains with support from the local school district and has been replicated in neighboring schools.

CASE (Career And Self-Exploration) team members implemented a curriculum based on Boston University’s Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitation model. In the classroom, youth engaged in self-directed career planning and developed a plan specific to their unique interests and needs. Outside the classroom, youth participated in vocational exploration activities and worked in the in-school coffee shop. CASE and the entrepreneurship component have been successfully replicated.

From day one we emphasized the importance of planning for sustainability after grant funding ceased. Prototype team members were continually pushed to consider how they would sustain critical pieces of grant work. These discussions and hypothetical solutions, while designed to spur creative juices, proved extremely useful. The strength of collaboration among the local demonstration prototype partners was tested when their operating budgets were slashed due to federal budget cuts. All three prototypes sustained. We believe that planning was crucial to their survival.

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