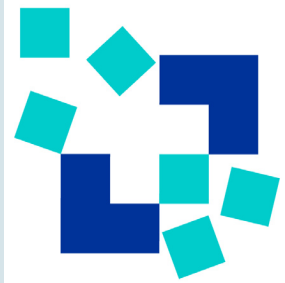


# Improving Transition Outcomes

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

## Value of IVRS Partnership



Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services proudly shares highlights from the first year of the Improving Transition Outcomes local demonstrations in Council Bluffs, Hawarden, and Henry County. VR is a critical partner in the success of each local demonstration.

In Council Bluffs, Counselor Lisa Chellew partnered with a local high school teacher, in a Train-the-Trainer approach, to team-teach Job Seeking Skills. This partnership proved to be very valuable as other teachers requested the teacher help them incorporate this unit into their curriculum. One student, a client of Lisa's and a senior, was offered a job after completing the Job Seeking Skills unit and just recently successfully closed Status 26 with natural supports.

In Hawarden, Counselor Randy Van Zee partnered with West Sioux Community School stakeholders to implement a curriculum developed specifically for youth with disabilities using the Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitation model. Randy's expertise has been invaluable. Randy problem solves with the team and introduces the youth to VR services. As a result, school referrals to VR have significantly increased.

In Henry County, Supervisor Ruth Allison and Counselor Christian Gapen have been instrumental in securing connections with the local schools. Ruth assisted with the focus groups and reviewed the interview information, helping organize the information for the "Sharing Key Discoveries" meeting with over 30 area stakeholders. One significant VR referral occurred during an interview when a youth who had dropped out and obtained her GED revealed that for the past four years she has been dealing with a major illness and "waiting until the magic age of 25" when VR could assist her. She couldn't remember the source of this erroneous information but was given correct information and is pursuing VR assistance. Two other youth were immediately informed about VR services during their interviews.

Without VR participation countless youth would be ill prepared for the world of work. Communities would suffer from the resulting decrease in civic participation and an increase in public assistance. A remedy is dissemination of accurate information about VR services spread via the schools, youth, families, team partners and more! Just as an "ounce of prevention" is said to be "worth a pound of cure" strategic community participation by VR yields tremendous benefits for youth with disabilities preparing to transition to post-secondary education and/or the world of work.

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# First Year Progress

The three communities received funds to implement strategies and activities developed by local partners specifically for improving transition outcomes for youth with disabilities through the use of intermediaries. Intermediaries facilitate local partnerships and relationships essential to connecting youth to services, opportunities and supports for a successful transition to post-secondary education and/or the world of work.

Council Bluffs has successfully:

- 1) Implemented E-Mentoring between more than thirty-five youth from six area high schools and employees from seven local employers
- 2) Identified job shadow and work experience opportunities
- 3) Recruited six youth to participate in the local Leadership Camp

Hawarden has successfully:

- 1) Implemented the C.A.S.E. curriculum based on Boston University's Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitation
- 2) Opened the "Falcon Joe" coffee shop to provide entrepreneurial experience for youth
- 3) Secured businesses for classroom presentations, job shadows and work experiences

Henry County has successfully:

- 1) Conducted focus groups with youth and families and individual interviews with youth to identify "what is and isn't working with transition"
- 2) Conducted a "Sharing Key Discoveries" meeting with over 30 local stakeholders reviewing the focus group and interview results. A Strategic Plan and the appointment of key stakeholders to address specific issues resulted from this meeting
- 3) Established a Youth Advisory Group of ten students with disabilities who have experience in the traditional high school, alternative high school, or GED program as either a current or past student

*Collaboration that exists within community teams needs to extend to other teams across the state...*

## Next Steps

Grant funding was the spark that ignited community efforts. A year later it is imperative that the fire remains lit despite the probability of low fuel. Sustainability must be independent of grant funding. Determining the cost per youth and the overall community impact will be essential to marketing these interventions to other stakeholders in the community and securing ownership.

Along with recognizing their successes and acknowledging that they have learned several lessons during the past year, communities also have challenges. Council Bluffs has expertise in mentoring and connecting employers and schools; they want more youth/family involvement and to strengthen

their connection with the schools. West Sioux has a strong school connection, expertise in youth participation, vocational curriculum and locally grown entrepreneurship; they want to implement mentoring. Henry County has expertise in conducting focus groups with youth and families; they want to implement vocational exploration and mentoring.

The strengths of one community appear to be potential resources for another. The collaboration that exists within the community teams now needs to extend to other teams across the state. Only by communities sharing "how we did it" with other communities will the State of Iowa achieve "healthy sharing, learning, recreation, goal-setting and problem-solving, not only for youth with disabilities but for all youth."