

# Improving Transition Outcomes

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

## Improving Transition Outcomes Prototypes

Improving Transition Outcomes with Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Governance Group partners Department for the Blind, Department of Education, Department of Human Services, Division of Persons with Disabilities, Governor's Developmental Disabilities Council, and Workforce Development, proudly shares highlights from the three prototypes.

Improving Transition Outcomes prototypes are local community demonstrations that implement strategies to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities ages 14-24. Prototypes are in Council Bluffs, Henry County, and West Sioux High School in Hawarden. Each prototype tests, adjusts and perfects strategies to meet the needs of youth, families, educators, employers and the larger community. Preparation for, securing, and maintaining employment are among the prototype outcome measures. Each prototype implements strategies developed by their local teams to address the specific needs of their community.

### Council Bluffs

E-mentoring is a critical component of the Council Bluffs Youth Connections prototype. Youth Connections currently facilitates E-mentoring and vocational exploration opportunities in the community for youth from seven area high schools. Mentors say, "...enjoy the experience," "...grateful to be involved," and "I enjoyed the program and I think the mentee also enjoyed it." Youth participants say that as a result of E-mailing mentors their keyboarding skills have improved and they have greater confidence in their writing skills. Educator praise includes, "all participating 12<sup>th</sup> grade students completed high school."



Mentors and mentees correspond weekly and messages are focused on succeeding in the workplace. Youth also participate in a variety of vocational exploration activities such as company tours and job shadows. Guest speakers from participating businesses share their company's hiring practices and workplace expectations with the youth. Paid work experience and a week long summer leadership camp are additional opportunities that emphasize self advocacy skill development available to the youth. Noteworthy outcomes from the Youth Connections prototype include youth not only indicating interest in post-secondary education but seniors registered for fall classes upon graduation and businesses hiring youth who participated in work experiences.

The Youth Connections team includes youth and young adults with disabilities, parents, Area Education Agency 13, Chamber of Commerce, League of Human Dignity, Iowa School for the Deaf, Iowa Workforce Development, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Iowa Western Community College, and Pottawattamie County.

### Henry County

Soliciting input from those "on the front lines" is a hallmark of the Henry County Transition Partners prototype. Identifying what is and isn't facilitating transition from secondary education to post-secondary education and/or employment for youth with disabilities was the first priority. Team members conducted multiple focus groups and individual interviews to gather the perspective of educators, family members and youth. Educators expressed the need for more information on

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

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adult services and supports. Family member frustrations included not knowing what services are available, what should be in place prior to graduation, and general dissatisfaction. Youth cited the lack of transportation, child care, and community connections among their barriers to successful transition.

Noteworthy outcomes from the focus groups and interviews include community brainstorming sessions specific to transition for youth with disabilities. One in particular, the community-wide “Sharing Key Discoveries” forum netted thirty-three active participants, including four school administrators, five employers, law enforcement and parents, working together to resolve the identified barriers to transition.

The Transition Partners team includes youth and young adults with disabilities, parents, Area Education Agency 16, Department of Human Services, Evert Conner Center for Independent Living, Henry County Central Point of Coordination, Henry County Extension, Healthy Henry County Communities, Iowa Workforce Development, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Mt. Pleasant Community Schools, New London School District, Southeastern Community College, WACO Schools, Winfield-Mt. Union Community School, and Young House Family Services.

### West Sioux High School, Hawarden

Vocational exploration leading to a student developed career plan is the focus of the West Sioux prototype. Youth participating in the West Sioux CASE class increase their self-awareness as they identify their vocational interests, strengths and personal values. The youth also gain entrepreneurship experience by running “Falcon Joe,” an in-school coffee shop. Not only do youth increase their knowledge of the working world but they also gain valuable leadership skills from working in the coffee shop.

Rock Valley’s Hope Haven, Inc. adapted an existing Boston University model for increasing self-awareness and applied it as a process of career planning for use with high school youth. Hope Haven staff members knowledgeable in the model equip West Sioux teachers to successfully incorporate the CASE curriculum using the “Train the Trainer” model. As the teachers learn how to implement the CASE curriculum, Hope Haven’s interaction decreases to consultation as needed.

Educators, youth and parents have equally praised the CASE curriculum for stimulating youth to explore vocational possibilities after high school. The West Sioux Board of Education has been very supportive. West Sioux administrators and teachers are supported by West Sioux Board members as they implement programs, such as CASE that yield a positive impact on student achievement.



The CASE team includes youth with disabilities and family members, Area Education Agency 4, Hawarden Area Partnership for Progress, Hope Haven, Inc., Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the local Transition Advisory Board, West Sioux Community School, and Workforce Development.

All prototypes are offered through the State of Iowa Improving Transition Outcomes grant project administered by Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services with funding through the US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. Prototype replication is encouraged and tools to assist with replication are under production.

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