

## Oregon Youth Transition Program

Location: Oregon

Date Submitted: 12/2009, updated 5/2011

Category: **Best Practice**

### BACKGROUND

Over the last two decades, there has been a national effort to develop effective secondary transition practices and to improve post school outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) included an emphasis on transition planning for all youth receiving special education services and emphasized that the fundamental purpose of a free appropriate education is to prepare youth for “further education, employment, and independent living”.

Although progress has been made, youth with disabilities still face multiple barriers when preparing to transition to productive adult roles in the community. Overall employment rates for people with disabilities are significantly lower than those without disabilities. A National Organization on Disability (N.O.D)/Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities poll reported that 35% of people with disabilities were employed full or part-time compared with 78% of people without disabilities. Youth with disabilities also lag far behind their peers without disabilities in school completion, and participation in post secondary education.

Oregon’s Youth Transition Program (YTP) is a comprehensive transition program for youth with disabilities implemented by the Oregon Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (OVRs), Oregon Department of Education, University of Oregon, and local school districts statewide in Oregon. The purpose of the program is to prepare youth with disabilities for employment or career related post secondary education or training. Staff may also assist participants in need seek health care and mental health services within the community. The program currently exists in 105 high schools and is funded through a combination of state and local funds from participating education and rehabilitation agencies. Participants have demonstrated consistently positive educational and employment outcomes.

### TITLE VMCH BLOCK GRANT MEASURES ADDRESSED

**#12:**Percent of children with and without special health care needs who received services necessary to make transitions to adult health care.

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

YTP has two distinct yet interconnected goals. The first goal is to improve post school transition outcomes for youth with disabilities by preparing them for employment or career related post secondary education/training. The second goal is to increase capacity and create systems change in schools and other agencies serving students with disabilities in transition from school to work.

### TARGET POPULATION SERVED

This practice is currently operating statewide in Oregon, serving 1,432 youth with disabilities in 105 high schools. YTP sites include both rural and urban communities, with large and small high schools. Since 1990, over 12,000 youth with disabilities have received YTP services.

### PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

The purpose of the Youth Transition Program is to provide a new pattern of services to students with disabilities beginning when they are still in high school and continuing into the early transition years. In each participating school district, YTP services are provided jointly by a Transition Specialist and a local Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Students participating in the YTP receive (a) individualized planning, focused on post school goals and self determination and help to coordinate school plans with relevant community agencies, (b) instruction in academic, vocational, independent living, and personal social skills and help to stay in and complete high school, (c) career development services including goal setting, career exploration, job search skills, and self advocacy, (d) paid employment including connections with local employers, on the job assessments, placement and training, (e) Support services such as individualized mentoring and support or referrals for additional specific interventions, and (f) follow-up support for one year after leaving the program to assist in maintaining positive outcomes in employment or post secondary settings.

Program staff also provides wrap around services by assisting those with physical disabilities and mental health issues such as anxiety or depression to obtain the care they need using community health providers.

### PROGRAM OUTCOMES/EVALUATION DATA

Extensive data were collected to document both the short term and long term outcomes associated with participation in the YTP. YTP data are entered into a secure web based data system developed and monitored by the University of Oregon. Short term outcomes measured include high school graduation and engagement in either employment or post school training upon program completion. Long term outcomes include 6 and 12 month follow up data to measure ongoing engagement over time in either employment or training. In addition to measuring individual outcomes for youth, overall site performance is tracked and monitored using a set of performance benchmarks developed by the Oregon OVRs. Sites must demonstrate positive progress and quality transition outcomes in order to receive continuation funding.

Over the last ten years, the program has documented: (a) increased collaboration and referrals to vocational rehabilitation, (b) development of individualized employment plans, (c) improvements in high school graduation rates, (d) positive employment outcomes (e.g. wages, hours worked per week) and (e) engagement in either competitive employment or career related post school training at exit, 6 months and 12 months after high school

### PROGRAM COST

YTP utilizes a combination of education and rehabilitation funds. Local schools apply to participate in the YTP model through a competitive request for proposal process. Successful schools submit matching funds and receive a grant from OVRs to develop and implement the program. Grant funds are used to support the salary of the Transition Specialists, travel, costs to attend YTP training events, and other operating expenses. Estimated cost per client is \$3,000.

### ASSETS & CHALLENGES

#### Assets

At the time the YTP was being launched supported employment programs for students with significant disabilities were just beginning to be developed with support from external grant funds OVRs administrators recognized the value of a creating a collaborative transition system to promote more positive employment and rehabilitation outcomes.

#### Challenges

One of the primary challenges to implementing the YTP initially was to coordinate service delivery across two very different systems – special education and rehabilitation.

A second challenge was creating a flexible transition service delivery models within public high schools that were operating in a traditional academic structure. Unemployment rates across Oregon soared in the last year making the job market much more difficult for young workers with disabilities. As of May 2009, Oregon's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 12.4 %, the highest unemployment rate on record since 1976.

### Overcoming Challenges

This program has overcome challenges by proactively using partnerships and available expertise to problem solve and provide resources to local YTP sites. Additionally, local sites participate in yearly training events and receive e-mail, phone and on site technical assistance to address site specific issues and barriers to program implementation.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- Transition for youth necessitates collaboration between service providers at multiple levels (e.g., public schools, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, State Departments of Education, community colleges, etc.) on a consistent, ongoing basis.
- Collaborative funding and dedicated staff time is critical for ongoing sustainability of efforts.
- Young adults need extensive career exploration, career development, job training and support to assist them in obtaining meaningful employment.
- Ongoing technical assistance and training is needed to facilitate collaborations between stakeholders, meet the needs of specific populations and create capacity within local schools and rehabilitation offices.

### FUTURE STEPS

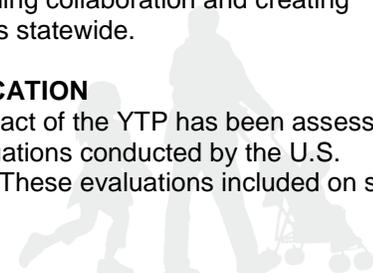
The YTP model is currently a line item in the OVRs state budget. Funds are allocated to continue to support contracts to local YTP sites as well as a biennial Training and Technical Assistance contract with the University of Oregon.

### COLLABORATIONS

This practice is a collaborative effort among Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Services (OVRs), Oregon Department of Education (ODE), the University of Oregon and local school districts in Oregon. Currently OVRs and ODE have an interagency agreement that defines roles and responsibilities for transition procedures and services. At the time the YTP was developed, interagency collaboration was not mandated. The YTP state management team helped to set the framework for building collaboration and creating effective transition services statewide.

### PEER REVIEW & REPLICATION

The effectiveness and impact of the YTP has been assessed through two external evaluations conducted by the U.S. Department of Education. These evaluations included on site



visits to local YTP sites, interviews with key stakeholders and an extensive review of data on program services and results. As a result of these early program evaluations the YTP was recognized in 1994 as an exemplary school to work transition model by the National Institute of Work and Learning, Academy for Educational Development. In 1995, the YTP was validated as an “educational program that works” and listed in the national registry of such programs within the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S Department of Education. The results of this program have been presented at national conferences and have led to several publications.

Over 85% of high schools in Oregon have participated in this program over the last twenty years. In addition, the model was replicated in schools and communities in Arizona and Alabama between 1995 and 1998.

### RESOURCES PROVIDED

There are a number of products and resources that have been developed to support YTP sites and document procedures and outcomes. These resources can be found on the Youth Transition Program website (<http://www.ytporegon.org>). In addition, a video called “Realizing Hopes and Dreams: Oregon Youth Transition Program” is available.

**Key words:** Transition, CYSHCN, Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Education, Program Integration, Collaboration Adolescents, Community-based, Disability, Employment

★ This program was recognized at AMCHP’s 2010 Annual Conference with a Best Practice award.

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