

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth)



<http://www.ncwd-youth.info>

NCWD/Youth

- Assists state and local workforce development systems to integrate youth with disabilities into their service strategies.
- Hopes to:
 - Improve state & local policy
 - Strengthen workforce development service delivery
 - Improve knowledge, skills and abilities of direct service workers

Who Are Our Partners?

- National Youth Employment Coalition
- National Association of Workforce Boards
- National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, University of Minnesota,
- National Conference of State Legislatures
- TransCen, Inc.
- Academy for Educational Development-Disability Studies & Services Program

The Stubborn Dilemma

- Poor Outcomes
 - Drop Out (YwD 3 times more likely)
 - College Rates (YwD half as likely)
 - Adjudication (YwD 4 times as likely)
 - Poverty (YwD 3 times more likely)
 - Unemployment (PwD 70% and holding)
 - Dependency (YwD on Social Security likely to stay throughout their entire life)
- Lot of Good Activities
 - but no real System
- Focus on Youth
- Transition is an Awkward Period of Life

Three “R’s” of Transition

Rigor

Relevance

Relationships

Rigor

- High Expectations
- Inclusion, Integration & Full Participation
- Work, Self-Sufficiency & Independent Living

Relevance

- First Process
 - No agreement across system on what is meant around transition
 - Then Outcomes
- Now Content and Relevance for Life
 - School-Based Preparatory Experiences
 - Career Exploration & Work-Based Learning
 - Youth Development & Leadership
 - Connecting Activities
 - Family Involvement & Supports

The Guideposts for Success

An extensive literature review of research, demonstration projects and effective practices covering a wide range of programs and services---including lessons from youth development, quality education, and workforce development programs---has identified core commonalities across the disciplines, programs and institutional settings. The review also points out that no one institution or organization can provide the full range of services; thus, highlighting the interdependence of agencies that requires communities, states, the federal government and multiple organizations at all levels to collaborate with one another in order to help assure quality transitions for all youth.

The applicable literature suggests that all youth need:

- Access to high quality standards-based education regardless of the setting;
- Information about career options and exposure to the world of work; including structured internships;
- Opportunities to develop social, civic, and leadership skills;
- Strong connections to caring adults;
- Access to safe places to interact with their peers; and,
- Support services and specific accommodations to allow them to become independent adults.

There are five categories, called ***Guideposts for Success***, which can help steer families, institutions and youth themselves through the transition processes.

School-Based Preparatory Experiences

All Youth Need:

- academic programs that are based on clear state standards;
- career and technical education programs that are based on professional and industry standards;
- curricular and program options based on universal design of school, work and community-based learning experiences;
- learning environments that are small and safe, including extra supports such as tutoring, as necessary;
- supports from and by highly qualified staff;
- access to an assessment system that includes multiple measures and,
- graduation standards that include options.

School-Based Preparatory Experiences

In addition, youth with disabilities need to:

- use their individual transition plans to drive their personal instruction, and strategies to continue the transition process post-schooling;
- access specific and individual learning accommodations while they are in school;
- develop knowledge of reasonable accommodations that they can request and control in educational settings, including assessment accommodations; and
- be supported by highly qualified transitional support staff that may or may not be school staff.

School-Based Preparatory Experiences

Given the experiences of trauma and inconsistency in the lives of foster youth, school-based experiences will need to include supplemental, services. Examples of those services are:

- Begin the transition work within the educational context at the 9th or 10th grades so that the youth, the case managers and the foster parents or caregivers can begin to build the necessary foundation for college or a vocational choice. This future planning and preparation will increase the likelihood of stability for the youth, and it can help to build a sense of hope for the youth.
- Identify one designated person within the school system or a designated intermediary organization who has the primary responsibility for monitoring and supporting the young person. That person, who might be a school social worker, a teacher or tutor, can provide the combined roles of advocate for the youth, as well as the “navigator” of services for the youth. These roles will be valuable as the young person approaches the points of transition.
- Ensure that the youth is mastering basic skills, including reading and literacy skills, as well as math and science. These are skills where foster youth often fall short, but will be essential as the young person begins to choose a career path.
- Provide re-enrollment for opportunities for foster youth who have dropped out of school or who have exited care without approval.
- Integrate the employment preparatory experiences with special education services. The full range of “transition” services should be coordinated and caregivers (foster parents, group home parents, etc.) should be included so they can assume an informed and supportive role for the young person. Involve the youth to the greatest degree possible in making their academic choices.
- Identify one central place for the educational records of a foster youth to be stored. Multiple placements can disrupt the academic record keeping process.

Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning

All youth need information on career options, including:

- Career assessments to help identify students' school and post-school preferences and interests;
- Structured exposure to post-secondary education and other life-long learning opportunities;
- Exposure to career opportunities that ultimately lead to a living wage, including information about educational requirements, entry requirements and income potential; and,
- Training designed to improve job-seeking skills and work-place basic skills (sometimes called soft skills).

Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning

To identify and attain *career goals*, all youth need

- Opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing; Access supports and accommodations for work and community living; and
- Multiple on-the-job training experiences, including community service (paid or unpaid) that is specifically linked to the content of a program of study and school credit
- Opportunities to learn and practice their work skills (“soft skills”); and,
- Opportunities to learn first-hand about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway.

Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning

Youth with Disabilities need:

- Understand the relationships between appropriate financial and benefits planning and career choices;
- Access supports and accommodations for work and community living; and
- Learn to communicate their support and accommodation needs to prospective employers and service providers.
- Learn to request, find, and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations at work, at home, and in the community.

Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning

Many foster youth have not had exposure to the wide range of career possibilities that exist for them. The employment and economic outcomes for this population are very poor. Career preparation opportunities for foster youth assist the foster youth in skill-building and to enhance their level of self-confidence and hope.

Recent efforts to support a successful transition for foster youth include:

- Emphasis on career exploration opportunities that build skills and connect a youth to a significant adult. These models include the building of long-term relationships between the youth and competent, caring adults who can teach specific job skills.
- Use of the Federal Foster Care Independence Act funds (a.k.a. The Chafee program) to leverage other youth employment opportunities for foster youth. The Chafee Program supports foster youth in transition with the broad range of services they might need, and the funding source is quite flexible.
- Intentional efforts to assist foster youth in developing the capacity for financial literacy. These strategies include Individual Development Accounts, and creating access to smart financial service (e.g. banks vs. check-cashing stores).
- Youth entrepreneurship opportunities that have the potential to empower young people, prepare them for the workplace, develop academic skills in a non-traditional manner and connect youth with a continuous, adult mentor.
- Comprehensive approaches that develop employment-based support of transportation and housing for transitioning youth.

Youth Development/Leadership

All Youth Need:

- Mentoring activities designed to establish strong relationships with adults through formal and informal settings;
- Peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities;
- Exposure to role models through a variety of means;
- Training in skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution
- Exposure to personal leadership and youth development activities, including community service; and,
- Opportunities that allow youth to exercise leadership.

Youth Development/Leadership

Youth with Disabilities Need:

- Have mentors and role models who include persons with and without disabilities; and,
- Understand disability history, culture, and disability public policy issues as well as their rights and responsibilities.

Youth Development/Leadership

For foster youth in transition, youth development and leadership skills represent the best opportunity to become caring and competent citizens and employees. The infusion of youth development and leadership skills into life skills and independent living programs for foster youth emphasizes: the competencies of personal and social efficacy; employability; personal autonomy; empathy and self-awareness. Youth development principles for this population are being integrated into existing youth employment program models in the following ways:

- Adding program components that guide youth on healthy decision-making, mediating conflict and community service;
- Adding program components that address family relationship skills;
- Adding program components that emphasize the value of setting goals- e.g.-savings in an Individual Development Account;
- Actively involving youth in all aspects of their life planning and their service plans;
- Creating opportunities for youth to participate in advocacy and civic engagements such as foster youth boards and involving youth in the management and the evaluation of the programs that are serving them;
- Incorporating independent living skills into youth employment programs in a way that encourages the young person to learn through active participation;
- Creating realistic timelines for transitioning youth that respect the unlikely scenario of achieving independence at age 18 years of age. Foster youth have a special need to learn from mistakes, especially in the workplace. Employers, via mentoring relationships at the job site, can assist the foster youth to turn challenge into a growth opportunity.
- Building into programs activities such as “rites of passage” or special recognition of accomplishments, some things that are not generally a part of the foster youth experience.

Connecting Activities

All Youth Need:

- Mental and physical health services;
- Transportation;
- Housing;
- Tutoring;
- Post-program supports through structured arrangements in post-secondary institutions and adult serving agencies; and,
- Connections to other services and/or opportunities (e.g. recreation)

Connecting Activities

Youth with Disabilities may also need:

- Acquisitions of appropriate assistive technologies;
- Community orientation and mobility training (e.g. accessible transportation, bus routes, housing, health clinics);
- Exposure to post-program supports such as independent living centers and other consumer-driven community-based support service agencies;
- Personal assistance services, including attendants, readers, interpreters, or other such services; and
- Benefits-planning counseling including information regarding the myriad of benefits available and their interrelationships so that they may maximize those benefits in transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency.

Connecting Activities

A well conceived approach to economic success for transitioning youth also has the potential to address their social and emotional concerns within the context of their career exploration. The recent approaches in child welfare emphasize the theme of **connectedness**- connecting the youth to the critical supports necessary for success and thus to the mainstream and connecting the foster youth to significant adults who can encourage and guide the way. **Connectedness** is a required program component for foster youth whose level of social support from family and community can be low. It is being manifest in programs in the following ways:

- Connecting foster youth to services through youth-driven meetings which include family members or foster parents;
- Connecting foster youth to family, peers, adult mentors who can support the young person through the employment experience and the corresponding independent living skills;
- Connecting foster youth to older youth who have already transitioned from care and have entered the work force;
- Connecting youth to volunteer and leadership roles in foster care boards and associations;

Connecting Activities con't.

- Connecting foster youth to safety education which prepares them to maintain their safety in personal relationships and in independent living situations;
- Connecting transitioning youth to the resources they will need to manage their own health care needs;
- Connecting foster youth to incentives such as recognition, wage supplements, IDAs that provide support for employers to hire foster youth;
- Connecting foster youth to lifetime networks of support, well beyond their 18th birthday, through activities such as Alumni associations or occasional events;
- Connecting youth to ongoing assessments such as the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment which is a reliable tool for measuring the acquisition of independent living skills. This standardized instrument allows the youth to track their own life skills progress and to lay out plans for improvement.

Family Involvement & Support

All youth need parents, families and other caring adults who have:

- High expectations which build upon the young person's strengths, interests, and needs and fosters their ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency;
- Been involved in their lives and assisting them toward adulthood;
- Access to information about employment, further education and community resources;
- Taken an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners;
- Access to medical, professional and peer support networks.

Family Involvement & Support

In addition, youth with disabilities need parents, families and other caring adults who have:

- An understanding of their youth's disability and how it affects his or her education, employment and/or daily living options;
- Knowledge of rights and responsibilities under various disability-related legislation;
- Knowledge of and access to programs, services, supports and accommodations available for young people with disabilities; and,
- An understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives.

Family Involvement & Supports

Too often, the child welfare system will minimize the family issues for older children, assuming that there is no possibility for a permanent home. Interestingly, the research indicates that a surprising number of youth return to their families, or at a minimum, their family of origin continues to have a presence in their lives. Still, the practices related to family permanency for young people who are preparing to transition from a long period in state custody, are only now emerging. For a young person, striving for economic independence and seeking a career opportunity, the support of an older family member is essential. When creating opportunities for economic success related to transitioning youth, the following principles are now being built into programs:

- Whenever possible, the youth needs to have a lead role in identifying the important family, kin or significant adult role models to be included in their life planning;
- The professional helping system has to use an expanded definition of “family”;
- “Family” team planning provides opportunities for collaborations among the service providers and the youth;
- The court system and attorneys for transitioning youth should be appraised of the young person’s situation and given an opportunity to support the planning process for career and employment options;
- Reunification with family members is in itself a difficult challenge that can not be separated from the young person’s desire to achieve economic success. Employment-based programs need to have a comprehensive and customized service for transitioning youth, which in turn might require a formal relationship with a private or public child welfare agency.

Relationships

- Networking—Resource Mapping
- Coordinating—Blending
- Cooperation—Braiding
- Collaboration—Sharing

Real Systems Change

- National Alliance on Secondary Education and Transition
- 8 State Intermediary
- 7 HS/HT State Implementation
- Florida Partners IN Transition Strategic Plan
- 3 State SpED Strategic Planning
- Smattering of Individual Districts
 - Rhode Island
 - Chicago

The Time is Right

- Everyone deserves a chance at the “American Dream”
- Pathways to Full Participation
 - Workplace
 - Community
 - Throughout Society

NCWD/Youth Resources

For further information, NCWD/Youth can be contacted at:

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info>

Collaborative@iel.org

National Youth Employment Coalition

<http://www.nyec.org>

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition

<http://www.ncset.org>

National Alliance on Secondary Education and Transition Framework

http://www.ncset.org/teleconferences/transcripts/2005_01.asp