

Transitioning Youth with Mental Health Needs to Meaningful Employment and Independent Living

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Purpose

- To identify promising practices related to career development, work experience, and employment for youth/young adults with mental health needs
- To identify common design features across successful programs

Background

Youth with diagnosed mental health needs are:

- **4 times** as likely to be suspended or expelled from secondary education
- **13.3 times** more likely to be arrested than their peers while in school

Background continued

- **70%** will be arrested within three years of leaving school
- **65%** will drop out of school before obtaining their high school diploma
- **3 times** as likely to live in poverty in comparison to other youth who drop out of high school

Background continued

- experience longer delays before obtaining employment
- have higher unemployment rates than youth with other types of disabilities
- exhibit unemployment rates of up to **70%**

Promising Approaches

- Systems of Care
- Assertive Community Treatment

However systems of care have focused on children and assertive community treatment have focused on adults.

Methodology

National scan of programs maintaining dual focus on:

- youth/young adults with mental health needs
- career preparation, work-based experience, employment, and related services

Methodology continued

Key informant interviews conducted with sources knowledgeable in fields of:

- mental health intervention
- education and training
- workforce development

Methodology continued

- telephone interviews with 18 nominated sites
- 5 sites selected for further study
- site visits conducted at all five programs
- structured interviews with mental health staff, education/training staff, case managers, youth and family members, and system partners

Participating Sites

1. Clark County Options Program,
Clark County Department of Community Services,
Vancouver, Washington
2. Mental Health Association (MHA) Village
Transitional Age Youth (TAY) Program,
Mental Health Association of Greater Los Angeles,
Long Beach, California
3. Our Town Integrated Service Agency (ISA),
Gallahue Mental Health Center and Mental Health America of Greater
Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana

Participating Sites continued

4. Transitional Community Treatment
Team (TCTT),
North Central Community Mental Health Center, Columbus, Ohio
5. Seattle Youth Development Project,
King County Department of Community and Human Services Work Training
Program and the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County,
Renton, Washington

Common Challenges Addressed

- stigma of traditional mental health therapy
- low self esteem
- lack of ownership by youth over their own life plans
- low expectations by society regarding ability of youth to succeed

Common Challenges continued

- traditional work-exposure and employment models that do not maximize individual strengths
- and lack of appropriate transitional housing in community

Common Program Features at Service Delivery Level

- Youth program location distinct and separate from adult service program location
- Opportunity for youth/young adult clients to guide program's services and policies

Common Program Features continued

- Individualized mental health interventions that are youth-friendly:
 - strategies to manage mental health condition
 - social engagement
 - identification of life goals
 - recognition of options for achieving goals
- Access to range of transitional housing options in community that fit level of independent living readiness

Exposure to World of Work and Career Options

- Assessment instruments that identify individual strengths, talents and skills leading to education and career goals
- Individualized support by program staff to identify:
 - training needs and work experience
 - jobs that are most appropriate and rewarding for individual clients

Common Design Features

- Exposure to diverse jobs and career pathways - critical for all youth, regardless of severity of condition
- Highly individualized employment - increases chances of individual success
- "Place and Train" rather than "Train and Place" philosophy

Relationship with Employers

- Importance of finding employers willing to become engaged
- Designing and implementing a “win-win” situation for employers and youth clients - results in meaningful work experience and a good employee for company
 - YouthSource
 - Options Program

Common Themes at Systems Level

- Partnerships with related agencies and organizations to provide comprehensive array of services to youth/young adults
- Ability to identify, access, and leverage funding streams to enhance and expand program services
- Understanding of multiple state and federal policies affecting transition-age youth

Conclusion

Study highlights importance of:

- connecting multiple systems for youth/young adults to access experiences needed for successful transition
- individualizing/customizing accommodations or supports in education, training and employment

Conclusion *continued*

- placing employment and training at forefront of goals and activities
- citing career preparation and skills development as “cornerstones” and “main focus”

Conclusion *continued*

- individualizing exposure to work and employment when youth/young adult is ready
- providing opportunities for work-based learning, abiding by philosophy of “place and train” rather than “train and place”

What constitutes success?

- For some youth with mental health needs - placement in competitive employment in community with minimal support
- For youth with most severe conditions - may mean work experience in on-site program business, with active involvement by supervisor

