NCWD/YOUTH

GUIDEPOSTS *for* SUCCESS

SECOND EDITION

NATIONAL COLLABORATIVE ON WORKFORCE AND DISABILITY

About the Collaborative

The National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) was created to help state and local workforce development systems improve outcomes for youth with disabilities. Housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) in Washington, D.C., NCWD/Youth is comprised of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, and workforce development policy and practice.

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GUIDEPOSTS FOR SUCCESS

The transition from youth to adulthood is challenging for almost every young person. This is particularly true for young people with disabilities. Yet, it is in those critical transition-age years that a young person's future can be determined. Part of a successful future includes finding and keeping work. The total employment rate is projected to increase by 15% in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Employment in occupations that generally require a college degree or other postsecondary credential is projected to grow much faster than other jobs across all occupations. Jobs requiring work-related training will still account for the majority of the new positions.

CHALLENGES FACING YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

Youth with disabilities, and particularly those with significant disabilities, often face difficulties in accessing the workforce development system. The workforce development system encompasses organizations at the national, state, and local levels with direct responsibility for planning, allocating resources (both public and private), providing administrative oversight, and operating programs to assist individuals and employers in obtaining education, training, job placement, and job recruitment.

Today, there continues to be a stubborn dilemma facing youth with disabilities. In spite of supportive legislation (e.g., the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** (IDEA), the **Americans with Disabilities Act** (ADA), and the **Rehabilitation Act**), and identified effective practices, many of these youth continue to experience high unemployment as well as insufficient opportunities to obtain competitive employment with the potential of career growth. Many youth with disabilities, and particularly those with significant disabilities, experience poor education and employment outcomes. Certainly, some youth with disabilities have attained successful careers. Some of these youth have benefited from well delivered special education transition services, while others have received timely and appropriately

ON AVERAGE, WORKING-AGE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES HAVE A LOWER LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, ARE POORER, AND FAR LESS LIKELY TO BE EMPLOYED THAN ADULTS WITHOUT DISABILITIES.

delivered youth employment services; many of these successes reflect both circumstances. Yet, these successes are not the norm.

Consider the following facts:

- Special education students are more than twice as likely as their peers in general education to drop out of high school.

- Youth with disabilities are half as likely as their peers without disabilities to participate in postsecondary education.
- The adjudication rate of youth with disabilities is four times higher than for youth without disabilities.
- Roughly 10% to 12% of all youth will present some form of mental health problem of significant severity to call for some sort of short-term special services and treatment at some point during their teenage years.
- More than half of youth identified with mental health needs will drop out of school, and only between 5% and 20% will enter postsecondary education.
- Approximately 5% of all school children have some form of a learning disability and are served under special education, while between 15% and 17% of all children have reading difficulties. Less than 8% of those with learning disabilities go on to college after high school.
- Two-thirds of those with learning disabilities have not been identified by the school system as having such disorders. The majority of this population is poor, disproportionately female, minority, and will not graduate from high school.
- Current special education students can expect to face much higher adult unemployment rates than their peers without disabilities.
- Young adults with disabilities are three times likelier to live in poverty as adults than their peers without disabilities.

YOUNG ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES ARE THREE TIMES LIKELIER TO LIVE IN POVERTY AS ADULTS THAN THEIR PEERS WITHOUT DISABILITIES.

Little or no expectation of success, low educational attainment, few vocational goals, and confusing government programs with conflicting eligibility criteria have resulted in many youth with disabilities not making a successful transition from school to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE CHANCES?

Research has identified educational and career development interventions that can make a positive difference in the lives of youth. Work-based learning experiences, preferably connected to curriculum content; student-centered individualized education programs that drive instruction; family involvement in and support of education and career development activities; and linkages to individually determined support services have all been proven, by both practice and research, to lead to the education and employment success of all youth, including youth with disabilities.

All youth need the following:

- 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 to allow them to become independent adults.

THE GUIDEPOSTS

NCWD/Youth has identified **Guideposts for Success** based on what research tells us that all youth need to transition to adulthood successfully. The **Guideposts** provide:

- a statement of principles;
- a direction that will lead to better outcomes for all young people; and,
- a way to organize policy and practice.

WHO SHOULD USE THEM AND HOW?

Youth and families should look for programs and activities that provide these features. Youth with disabilities should use the **Guideposts** in developing any individualized plans, such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE), and service strategies as required by the Workforce Investment Act.

State level policy makers should use the **Guideposts** as a strategic organizational framework which can assist them in moving the state's transition planning from a stove-pipe focus on guiding categorical programs and funding to a more coordinated transition system focusing on successful outcomes for all youth.

Administrators and policy makers at the local level should use the **Guideposts** in making decisions regarding funding, in setting and establishing local priorities related to transitioning youth, and in evaluating the work of agencies supported by that funding.

Youth Service Practitioners should use the **Guideposts,** and tools that NCWD/Youth has developed to implement them in their work.

The Guideposts are based on the important following assumptions:

1. High expectations for all youth, including youth with disabilities;
2. Equality of opportunity for everyone, including nondiscrimination, individualization, inclusion, and integration;
3. Full participation through self-determination, informed choice, and participation in decision-making;
4. Independent living, including skills development and long-term supports and services;
5. Competitive employment and economic self sufficiency, which may include supports; and,
6. Individualized, person-driven, and culturally and linguistically appropriate transition planning.

The Guideposts framework is organized in the following manner. After providing a detailed list within each Guidepost of what all youth need, the framework then describes additional specific needs pertaining to youth with disabilities. By addressing these specific needs policymakers, program administrators, youth service practitioners, parents, family members, and youth will have access to a foundation that will lead to work, further education, and independent community living.

GUIDEPOST 1
SCHOOL-BASED PREPARATORY EXPERIENCES

In order to perform at optimal levels in all education settings, all youth need to participate in educational programs grounded in standards, clear performance expectations, and graduation exit options based upon meaningful, accurate, and relevant indicators of student learning and skills. **These should include the following:**

...ALL YOUTH NEED TO PARTICIPATE IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS GROUNDED IN STANDARDS, CLEAR PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS, AND GRADUATION EXIT OPTIONS...

- 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.

In addition, youth with disabilities need to do the following:

- use their individual transition plans to drive their personal instruction, and use strategies to continue the transition process post-schooling;
- have access to 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.

GUIDEPOST 2

CAREER PREPARATION AND WORK-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Career preparation and work-based learning experiences are essential in order for youth to form and develop aspirations and to make informed choices about careers. These experiences can be provided during the school day or through after-school programs, and will require collaborations with other organizations. **All youth need information on career options, including the following:**

- career assessments to help identify students' school and post-school preferences and interests;
- structured exposure to postsecondary 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, income and benefits potential, and asset accumulation; and,
- training designed to improve job-seeking skills and work-place basic skills (sometimes called "soft skills").

In order to identify and attain career goals, youth need to be exposed to a range of experiences, including the following:

- opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing;
- multiple on-the-job training experiences (paid or unpaid), including community service, that are specifically linked to the content of a program of study and school credit;
- opportunities to learn and practice their work skills (so-called "soft skills"); and,
- opportunities to learn first-hand about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway.

In addition, youth with disabilities need to do one or more of the following:

- understand the relationships between benefits planning and career choices;
- learn to communicate their disability-related work support and accommodation needs; and,
- learn to find, formally request, and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations in education, training, and employment settings.

IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY AND ATTAIN CAREER GOALS, YOUTH NEED TO BE EXPOSED TO A RANGE OF EXPERIENCES.

GUIDEPOST 3
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Youth Development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them gain skills and competencies. Youth leadership is part of that process. **In order to control and direct their own lives based on informed decisions, all youth need the following:**

- mentoring activities designed to establish strong relationships with adults through formal and informal settings;
- peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities;
- exposure to role models in a variety of contexts;
- 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 and build self-esteem.

Youth with disabilities also need the following:

- mentors and role models, including persons with and without disabilities; and,
- an understanding of disability history, culture, and disability public policy issues as well as their rights and responsibilities.

...ALL YOUTH NEED OPPORTUNITIES THAT ALLOW THEM TO EXERCISE LEADERSHIP AND BUILD SELF-ESTEEM.

GUIDEPOST 4
CONNECTING ACTIVITIES

Young people need to be connected to programs, services, activities, and supports that help them gain access to chosen post-school options. **All youth may need one or more of the following:**

- mental and physical health services;
- transportation;
- housing;
- tutoring;
- financial planning and management;
- post-program supports through structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies; and,
- connection to other services and opportunities (e.g. recreation).

Youth with disabilities may need one or more of the following:

- acquisition of appropriate assistive technologies;
- community orientation and mobility/travel 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 youth may maximize those benefits in transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency.

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO BE CONNECTED TO PROGRAMS, SERVICES, ACTIVITIES, AND SUPPORTS THAT HELP THEM GAIN ACCESS TO CHOSEN POST-SCHOOL OPTIONS.

GUIDEPOST 5
FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORTS

Participation and involvement of parents, family members, and/or other caring adults promotes the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth, leading to better post-school outcomes. **All youth need parents, families, and other caring adults who do the following:**

- have high expectations that build upon the young person's strengths, interests, and needs and that foster each youth's ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency;
- remain involved in their lives and assist them toward adulthood;
- have access to information about employment, further education, and community resources;
- take an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners; and,
- have access to medical, professional, and peer support networks.

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

- an understanding of the youth's disability and how it may affect his or her education, employment, and 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.

ALL YOUTH NEED THE SUPPORT OF PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS, AND OTHER CARING ADULTS.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

Center for Workforce Development,
the Institute for Educational Leadership

National Youth Employment Coalition

Center on Education and Work,
the University of Wisconsin, Madison

National Center on Secondary Education
& Transition, the University of Minnesota

The PACER Center

NCWD/YOUTH

1-877-871-0744 (toll free)

1-877-871-0665 (TTY toll free)

http://www.ncwd-youth.info

contact@ncwd-youth.info

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1-877-871-0744 (toll free)
1-877-871-0665 (TTY toll free)
www.ncwd-youth.info
Collaborative@iel.org

ODEP
Office of Disability Employment Policy

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability
NCWD
For Youth

Navigating the Road to Work
Making the Connection between Youth with Disabilities & Employment