



## **GUIDEPOSTS FOR SUCCESS: QUALITY YOUTH TRANSITION SERVICES**

Transition from youth to adulthood is an awkward period in life; it presents challenges for almost every young person today. Youth with disabilities, indeed all vulnerable youth, may need extra supports throughout their transition period in order to make informed choices and become self-sufficient adults.

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. These ***Guideposts*** are built on the following underlying assumptions:

- 1) Highest expectations for all youth, including youth with disabilities;
- 2) Equality of opportunity for everyone, including nondiscrimination, individualization, and inclusion and integration;
- 3) Full participation through self-determination, informed choice, and participation in decision making;
- 4) Independent living, including skill development and long term supports and services;
- 5) Competitive employment and economic self sufficiency, even if with supports, is everyone's life goal; and,
- 6) Transition planning is individualized, person-driven and culturally and linguistically appropriate.

# GUIDEPOSTS FOR SUCCESS

## **General Needs    Specific Needs**

### **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:

- 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:

- 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.

### **2. Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning Experiences**

Career preparation and work-based learning experiences are essential in order to form and develop aspirations and to make informed choices about careers. These experiences can be provided during the school day, through after-school programs and will require collaborations with other organizations. 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, 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:

- opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing;
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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;</li> <li>• opportunities to learn and practice their work skills ("soft skills"); and,</li> <li>• opportunities to learn first-hand about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, youth with disabilities need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand the relationships between benefits planning and career choices;</li> <li>• learn to communicate their disability-related work support and accommodation needs;</li> <li>• learn to find, formally request and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations in education, training and employment settings.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Youth Development &amp; Leadership</b>	<p>In order to control and direct their own lives based on informed decisions, all youth need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mentoring activities designed to establish strong relationships with adults through formal and informal settings;</li> <li>• peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities;</li> <li>• exposure to role models in a variety of contexts;</li> <li>• training in skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution;</li> <li>• exposure to personal leadership and youth development activities, including community service;</li> <li>• opportunities that allow youth to exercise leadership and build self-esteem.</li> </ul> <p>Youth with disabilities also need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mentors and role models including persons with and without disabilities;</li> <li>• an understanding of disability history, culture, and disability public policy issues as well as their rights and responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Connecting Activities</b>	<p>All youth may also need one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mental and physical health services;</li> <li>• transportation;</li> <li>• tutoring</li> <li>• financial planning and management;</li> <li>• post-program supports thorough structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies;</li> <li>• connection to other services and opportunities (e.g., recreation).</li> </ul> <p>Youth with disabilities may need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acquisition of appropriate assistive technologies;</li> <li>• community orientation and mobility training (e.g. accessible transportation, bus routes, housing, health clinics);</li> <li>• exposure to post-program supports such as independent living centers and other consumer-driven community-based support service agencies;</li> <li>• personal assistance services, including attendants, readers, interpreters, or</li> </ul>

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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.

### **5. Family Involvement & Supports**

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.

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.

For research citations and further information about how to use these Guideposts for Success to build successful transitions for youth contact:

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To obtain this publication in an alternate format please contact the Collaborative. The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) is composed of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, and workforce development issues. NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. The Collaborative is charged with assisting state and local workforce development systems to integrate youth with disabilities into their service strategies.

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