

Running head: Employment

Employment Barriers for People with Disabilities

A white paper written by youth leaders from the Youth Leadership Development Institute
2011

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Youth Leadership Development Institute

Introduction to the Youth Leadership Development Institute (YLDI):

The Youth Leadership Development Institute was established through support from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau's State Implementation Grant. This Institute worked to promote the development of advocacy and leadership skills in youth with disabilities. The developers of the curriculum believed in the importance of creating youth lead and youth focused programs, in order to develop a network of peer mentors. Youth who attended these events were between the ages of 16-28, had a disclosed disability, and were identified as emerging leaders.

Purpose of the YLDI:

The goal of the YLDI is to provide a safe, accepting environment to cultivate the growth of self-acceptance, confidence, and self-advocacy skills. Youth leaving the YLDI program should feel more accepting of themselves with a disability, more confident in their abilities and choices, and a connection to the other youth attending the YLDI, as well as to the disability community as a whole.

Youth Leadership Development Institute White Papers

Introduction to the White Papers

In recognition of the finite time that this group of youth leaders had together, the members of the YLDI decided that they wanted to leave a legacy of the work that they had done together. They recognized the devastating outcomes that can be a result of the unaddressed barriers that youth with disabilities commonly face. In an effort to address these issues, the youth decided to develop a set of twelve white papers, which identify the discrimination and barriers that youth endure.

Development of the White Papers

In November of 2009, the first YLDI was held in Cranberry Pennsylvania, approximately twenty youth with disabilities attended this event from that group eight youth were selected to take on

leadership positions for future YLDI events. Throughout the following two years three additional YLDI trainings were held and from those three twelve additional leaders were chosen to assist in creating training materials, leading sessions, speaking to officials about youth issues, and creating white papers. In the last year of the program these twenty leaders attended advanced leadership institutes where they assisted in developing the twelve white papers.

During this two-year endeavor, the twenty leaders (ages 16-29) met on four different occasions to identify the top issues faced by youth, define source of the problems, and create recommendations. These four weekend meetings produced the foundation of each of these documents. The twelve white papers developed include:

- Employment
- Education
- Self-Advocacy
- Healthcare
- Independent Living
- Youth Leadership Development
- Social Relationships
- Disability Stigma
- Transition
- Transportation
- Top Issues: Summary of Concerns

Youth then volunteered to further develop these documents into policy papers. Each paper was then edited by the other leaders. These papers are to be used to identify the barriers faced by youth and to recognize the importance of the youth voice in developing solutions.

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Employment Barriers for People with Disabilities

Lack of Specialized Counselors

PROBLEM

Currently there is a lack of vocational and rehabilitation counselors who are trained and employed to assist people with disabilities in obtaining employment. This results in an overload of cases for existing counselors, restricting their ability to adequately meet the needs of their clients. In addition to a lack of counselors, most current counselors have not received adequate education or experience with the needs of the youth transitioning out of high school.

RESOLUTION 1

Increased practicum placements- Encourage the further development of practicum programs for students enrolled in Vocational Rehabilitation masters programs. These students would shadow the Vocational Rehab Counselor as well as assist with phone calls, paperwork etc. thereby alleviating some of the burden of having a high caseload. During their practicum and internships, a certain number of required hours should be designated to working with transition age youth. This could be done through working with transition coordinators, attending IEP meetings, or working with other vocational counselors in setting up employment plans for young adults.

RESOLUTION 2

Credits for transition training- Continuing education credits should be made more readily available on the topics of youth development, self determination, and transition in order to encourage and improve the counselors' knowledge of current issues facing transition aged youth.

RESOLUTION 3

Teacher/counselor collaboration- Vocational Counselors need to collaborate with Special Education teachers to share training and disability information. This collaboration could increase a counselor's awareness of the specific needs of youth who will be transitioning and entering the vocational rehabilitation office to seek employment. These counselors could become involved in student IEP and transition plan meetings, so

that needs of the student may be met prior to graduating and improving the transition process. Teachers could also become further involved in preparing the student for transition through individualizing their curriculum to address the student's unique needs and goals.

Client Self-Determination

PROBLEM

Vocational counselors often focus their efforts on job placement rather than emphasizing the desires of the clients. These clients are often placed with little flexibility at job sites which do not match with their interest or wishes.

RESOLUTION 1

Team approach- A team approach should be taken to develop vocational goals and strategies. The client should be recognized as the lead team member, an expert on his or her goals and interests.

RESOLUTION 2

Individual focused goals- Vocational counselors should focus on client self-determination and interests. Rather than focusing on the impossibility of certain youth obtaining their potentially unrealistic "dream jobs" the counselor needs to explore with the client related jobs that include his or her goals and interests.

Lack of Employer Understanding of Disabilities

PROBLEM:

Getting a job as a person with a disability can be further complicated through barriers in the application, interview, and hiring processes. Employers often do not know about their obligations to applicants with disabilities, therefore decreasing chances of an individual is with a disability being hired.

RESOLUTION 1

Employer training- Employers must understand the regulations from the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act, as well as recognize their importance. Although employers have an obligation to provide reasonable accommodations that enable applicants with disabilities to apply for jobs, they are often afraid of the potential legal bindings of hiring a person with a disability. Therefore, rather than dealing with the fear of lawsuits, they decide to avoid the situation and not hire people with disabilities. Continuing education credits and mandates must be established to encourage employers to attend training workshops on accommodations, laws, and services for the employer. These trainings should expound upon the importance and advantages of hiring people with disabilities, rather than the mere meeting of legal mandates.

RESOLUTION 2

Accessibility training- Continuing education workshops can provide information on recruiting employers with disabilities, creating accessible interview locations, providing sign language interpreters, and conducting modified testing. Career centers and vocational rehabilitation counselors may be able to assist employers in finding supports for providing these accommodations.

Misconception of Ability

PROBLEM

When an employer is uneducated about disabilities and the capabilities of an individual with a disability, a misconception can occur that the individual will not be able to perform certain job tasks. This misconception can often lead to the individual's disqualification from employment.

RESOLUTION 1

Supports for employers - Employers should have the opportunity to attend educational sessions on employment supports for hiring people with disabilities, as well as having direct contact with career centers and vocational rehabilitation. This interaction could decrease employers' concerns on available supports and legal issues.

RESOLUTION 2

Liaison support- When a question arises about the ability of an individual to fulfill job requirements, a meeting should be called between the employer, employee, and vocational counselor to discuss the concerns.

Post-Hire: Lack of on the Job Accommodations and Training

PROBLEM

Once hired an employer will often overlook the need for certain accommodations or job training support because of a lack of knowledge or communication. One reason for these barriers may be due to a lack of involvement from the vocational counselor.

RESOLUTION 1

Site visitation- After a job offer is made, the vocational counselor should visit the site and tour with the potential employer to perform a Job Analysis. The analysis will include physical barriers, ergonomic challenges, and barriers that would require accommodations. The job analysis should also include: evaluating the need for personal care attendants or nurses, handling disability equipment, and addressing potential mental health concerns.

RESOLUTION 2

Liaison- A designated liaison should be designated to handle accommodations and coordinate training of all supervisors, managers, foremen, crew leaders, HR representatives and anyone involved in the supervision of employees. The liaison could serve as the “contact” person should any problems arise, either for the client or other staff working with the client. This could be an OVR counselor or other person the client deems appropriate.

Disability Disclosure

PROBLEM

Many individuals face barriers in the workplace due to an inability of discussing their disability and needs with management. Unfortunately,

this lack of communication can lead to difficulties in completing tasks, often causing disciplinary action or termination. These barriers could be avoided with a disclosure of the individual's disability

RESOLUTION

Self-awareness education- All individuals with disabilities must understand their disability and accommodations. They must be able to communicate their needs in order to receive reasonable accommodations and protection under the law. It may be difficult for some individuals to understand when to disclose their disability, to whom, and what information to include. Disability disclosure may be different for everyone and should be addressed prior to pursuing employment.