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Youth with Disabilities

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Youth with disabilities have been added to the list of neediest out-of-school youth as described in the Department of Labor's strategic youth vision (TEGL 28-05).

Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs use the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) definition of a **disability** as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual. Major life activities include walking, speaking, sitting, hearing, standing, learning, breathing, thinking, self-care, seeing, and working. Individuals are considered disabled if there is a record of such an impairment or if they are regarded as having such an impairment.

Examples of Disabilities		
Cognitive	Emotional or Behavioral	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Disabilities • Mental Retardation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) • Bi-polar Disorder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blind/visually impaired • Deaf/hearing impaired • Health impairments, such as brain injuries

Although youth with disabilities participate more in education, work, and community life than in the past, they still participate less than the general youth population. Some of this is due to factors related to their disability, but much is due to the prejudices and misperceptions of the general population.

Selected Statistics for All Youth with Disabilities
<p>Youth with disabilities obtain less education than the general youth population.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70.3% completed high school – 85% of all students graduated from high school. • 32% attended postsecondary education – less than half the rate of all students. <p>Most youth with disabilities work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70% worked during the two years after leaving high school; 39% worked full-time at their current or most recent job. • Of those who worked: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 85% earned above minimum wage; hourly earnings averaged \$7.30. ◦ About one-third received benefits (health insurance, paid vacation or sick leave, retirement). ◦ Among youth employed more than 6 months, 58.8% report promotion, taking on more responsibility, or a pay increase. <p>Youth with disabilities are not likely to tell their employers or their college about their disability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 40% of postsecondary students with a disability told their school about their disability; about half of postsecondary youth with a disability do not consider themselves disabled. • 90% did not tell their current or most recent employer about their disability; 4% received accommodations from their employer. <p>Youth with disabilities participate in their communities, but many have challenges in developing satisfying community interactions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% volunteered or participated in community service – 39% of all youth volunteer after leaving high school; 44% during high school. • 28.9% live in poverty, compared to 16.3% of all youth.

Selected Statistics for All Youth with Disabilities (continued)

Youth with disabilities participate in their communities, but many have challenges in developing satisfying community interactions. (continued)

- 28% participated as a member of a community group (sports teams, performing group, hobby club).
- Over 50% had at some time experienced negative consequences such as disciplinary action at school, were fired from a job, or were arrested.

Source National Longitudinal Transition Study-2

Youth with different disabilities have different rates of participation or success in different activities. This is why it is so important that activities planned for youth with disabilities are very individualized.

Selected Outcomes for Different Disabilities

- **Graduation from high school.** Ranged from 94% for visually impaired youth to 50.8% for youth with multiple disabilities or deaf/blindness.
- **Postsecondary education participation.** Ranged from 66.1% for visually impaired youth to 13.3% for youth with mental retardation.
- **Employment during the two years after leaving high school.** Ranged from 78.5 for youth with learning disabilities to 36.1% for youth with multiple disabilities or deaf/blindness.
- **Participation in community activities.** Ranged from 44.5% for hearing impaired youth to 13.3% for youth with multiple disabilities or deaf/blindness; volunteering/community service ranged from 53.8% for visually impaired youth to 14.1% for youth with emotional disturbances.
- **Experienced negative consequences (such as arrest or being fired).** Ranged from 88.9% for youth with emotional disturbances to 14.6% for visually impaired youth.
- **Living in poverty.** Ranged from 46% for youth with mental retardation to 19.7% for youth with other health impairments.

Transition for Youth with Disabilities

Youth with disabilities have access to school-based programs specifically designed to meet their needs. Special education programs in schools help children meet appropriate educational goals as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and No Child Left Behind. Youth, teachers, and counselors develop Individual Education Plans (IEPs), that by age 14, must include transition planning for post-graduation goals and activities.

As youth reach age 18, exit from formal primary/secondary education, and enter the workforce, they move from a more comprehensive to a more fragmented system of support. Youth age out of some services like foster care or school-based services and need to begin or change existing relationships with programs like Medicaid, Social Security, health care, and vocational rehabilitation.

Youth with disabilities may also move from a protected, dependent, child status to independent adult status, sometimes without a great deal of experience. Adult-oriented employment or educational programs may not provide support in other areas necessary for a youth with disabilities to function independently in the community. In this transition, youth can sometimes fall through the cracks.

How Can WIA Youth Programs Work with Youth with Disabilities?

WIA youth programs offer services that enhance youth development and meet the needs of youth with disabilities. To effectively serve youth with disabilities, WIA programs need to address specific issues:

- **Attitudes of staff and vendors.** Staff may be afraid, uncomfortable, or not well informed. To make programs friendly, staff should be educated about the range of disabilities and how to interact with youth with a disability. Staff must focus on the individual youth first and only secondarily on the disability; eliminating barriers in the environment should be the focus rather than the “problem” of the disability. Staff should be knowledgeable about existing resources and creative when existing resources are not sufficient.

- **Disclosure.** Some disabilities are obvious (e.g., use of a guide dog or a wheelchair), but others may be invisible (e.g., learning disabilities). It is always the prerogative of the youth with the disability to disclose or not to disclose the disability. Programs should ensure information about disabilities is not inappropriately disclosed.
- **Privacy.** Privacy laws may restrict access to health, school, and vocational rehabilitation information that would be valuable in developing an individual service strategy (ISS) for a youth with disabilities. Programs should seek permission to access information.
- **Accommodations in employment.** Employers may be reluctant to provide work experience or summer employment opportunities for youth with disabilities because of fears of liability or the costs of complying with ADA mandates. Programs should provide employers with information about accommodations and costs; programs may also find funds to help employers provide accommodations when needed for participation.
- **Accessibility.** Federally funded programs are obligated by law to provide equal access to their programs, activities, and services to youth with disabilities:
 - o **Physical access** – ramps for wheelchairs, automatic door openers, accessible restrooms.
 - o **Website access** – compatible with commonly used assistive technology and WIA Section 508 guidelines. See <http://www.w3.org/WAI/Resources/> for more information.
 - o **Access to communications** – publications in alternative formats (Braille, audiotapes), interpreters for the deaf, adapted computer keyboards, TTY/TDD telecommunications devices for the deaf.

WIA youth programs do not have primary responsibility for assisting youth with disabilities in the transition to independent adult living; WIA youth programs should ensure that youth with disabilities receive services from other agencies and community resources.

Agency	Services
Vocational rehabilitation	Training and assistance that leads to employment
Mental health and mental retardation agencies	Comprehensive services for individuals with mental illness or mental retardation.
Independent living centers	Services to help achieve and maintain self-sufficient lives within their community
Social Security Administration	Benefits for people with a severe mental or physical disability who are unable to do substantial work: Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS), and Medicaid (provided through county departments of job and family services).
Postsecondary education and training providers	Lifelong education and training opportunities.
One-Stops and other workforce development centers	Employment and training opportunities, job listings, placement assistance, skill assessments.
Community resources and organizations	Social interaction and development activities through churches, recreation programs, clubs, sports teams, and service organizations.
Employers	Jobs and job training opportunities.

Finally, agencies that serve youth with disabilities use a set of effective transition practices that WIA youth programs should also follow.

Effective Transition Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize self-determination and self-advocacy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Youth need to shift from adult-directed to self-directed decision-making as they assume adult roles o Youth must be able to advocate for themselves as they interact with people, agencies, and organizations that affect their lives. • Make planning person-centered and individualized. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o A disability is only one aspect of a person; develop an ISS that addresses the whole person.

Effective Transition Practices (continued)

- Involve family and support networks.
 - The ability of a youth to enjoy a good quality of life requires the support and guidance available from family, friends and other natural supports.
 - Family involvement is a factor that consistently results in successful school and adult outcomes and will help to ensure success long after the youth leaves the program.
- Maintain high expectations and aspirations.
 - Youth with disabilities enjoy the same activities as other youth. Do not assume that youth are unwilling or unable to participate in an activity solely on the basis of their disability.
- Focus on community outcomes.
 - Youth must be prepared to plan and implement their future learning, living arrangements, recreation, work and career development, citizenship, and social activities in a community environment.
- Cultivate interagency collaboration.
 - Comprehensive transition programs maintain strong ties between agencies in order to provide the support that youth with disabilities need to achieve their desired adult goals.

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