

Transition Bulletin - Spring Issue

To Coordinate... To Enhance... To Serve... Through Communication

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Michigan Rehabilitation Services Innovation and America Recovery and Reinvestment Act Projects Benefit Youth

By: Cynthia Wright, Rehabilitation Consultant

Stop and think about it - everything we do in vocational rehabilitation and education to support individuals with disabilities was once an innovation. When you think about innovation from this perspective, it is easy to see how essential innovation, creativity and new ideas are to the growth and evolution of our work as a community of transition professionals.

MRS recently reorganized and a new unit has been established called the Program Innovation Unit that is managed by Tina Fullerton. This unit is in the Western Division under the direction of Dennis Hart. The main charge of the unit is to promote program innovation within MRS to increase employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Funds have been set aside that MRS district offices (in collaboration with local community partners) can capture by submitting innovative proposals. Tina Fullerton is an inspiring manager of the Innovation Unit. In regards to creating and implementing innovative services

to youth Tina states, "To be able to provide an opportunity for our creative and talented field staff to design forward thinking programming to better serve the unique needs of our Transition Student Customers, is both exciting and rewarding."

In this issue of the Transition Bulletin several exciting innovative projects and one ARRA project will be highlighted that benefit youth with disabilities. I want to express my most sincere thanks to MRS counselors that took valuable time out of their busy schedules to write articles about projects in their area for the benefit of Transition Bulletin readers. A great big, "Thank you!" to Kate Kierpiec, Sheila Eder, Stacy Janusz and Bill Colombo.

The following innovation projects are highlighted:

- **GECKO Program** in Eaton County
- **Recycling Program** in Jackson County
- **LITE Program** in Kent County at Grand Valley State University
- **Career Tech Center After-Hours & Summer Program** in Northern Michigan

And one ARRA project is highlighted:

- **Grand Traverse Resort and Spa (GTRS) Hospitality Training Program** in Northern Michigan

I hope you enjoy reading about these interesting and unique programs.

"Innovation is fun and essential."

Eaton County's GECKO Program Utilizes Work Experience & Technology to Prepare Students for Competitive Employment

By: Kate Kierpiec, MA, CRC, LPC

Data shows that teenagers today have been facing stiff competition for available jobs. During labor market downturns, older workers with more experience or skills compete for available jobs in industries that employ predominately teens. In such cases, employers may prefer older persons with more experience than inexperienced teens (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

To address this concern, Michigan Rehabilitation Services – Lansing District Office has utilized a MRS Innovation Grant to establish a community-based work assessment program in Eaton County. The GECKO Program (Giving Eaton County Kids Opportunities) focuses on providing pre-vocational training, guidance, and experience for selected students from the certificate program at Grand Ledge High School. This program provides students with an opportunity to learn job skills and experience real world responsibilities and consequences, while receiving support from both their local school and MRS transition counselor. It is anticipated that through their participation in the GECKO Program, students will have a better understanding of their abilities and skills which will assist them in seeking and obtaining paid community employment. After successfully completing their community-based work experience, students will then begin working closely with Michigan Rehabilitation Services for further vocational support to obtain paid community employment.

**"Creative activity could be described as a type of learning process where teacher and pupil are located in the same individual."
- Arthur Koestler**

In its inaugural year, the GECKO Program will continue to assist 15 students in the certificate track program at Grand Ledge High School in obtaining paid employment by providing them with:

- Work-based learning curriculum presented in the classroom,
- Trial work experience for one to two trimester(s) with a community employer,
- Job coaches to assist with initially learning job duties and responsibilities,
- Use of assistive technology in the form of iTouches as a modern way to promote customer independence and minimizing reliance on a job coach,
- Vocational counseling and guidance to obtain paid community employment upon completion of their trial work experience. By utilizing assistive technology, mentoring with a community employer, pre-vocational curriculum, and the exposure to job possibilities, the vision and mission of MRS is fulfilled.

Given the current economic climate in the United States, but specifically Michigan, the need to provide these aforementioned work assessment services for transitioning youth with disabilities is paramount for their future vocational success. Implementing a program such as GECKO further supports the philosophy of Michigan Rehabilitation Services as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act in that it seeks to empower individuals with disabilities to maximize employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence and inclusion into society, through the guarantee of an equal opportunity.



Comments from students:

"The GECKO Program has benefited me greatly! Through the program, I have gotten so much experience about the world of work which has helped me to get a paid job. I hope that other students are able to have this opportunity also." –Jesse

"The GECKO Program has helped me understand my responsibilities as an employee by teaching me what to do (and what not to do) so that I can keep a job. I am thankful for the new experiences and opportunities." Mercedes

"The GECKO Program has helped me because I can learn job duties with support to avoid making mistakes in a paid position. Also, I have learned useful tools to help me prepare for and be successful in job interviews" –Chelsea

MRS Innovation Grant: An Opportunity Not to 'Waste'

By: Sheila Eder, Rehabilitation Counselor from the Jackson MRS Office

"To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard common situations from a new angle, requires creativity, imagination and innovation."

- Tina Fullerton

The Jackson MRS office, in cooperation with Work Services Inc. and Northwest Refuse Inc., has a unique program that offers youth between the ages of 16-24 throughout Jackson County opportunities to get down and dirty. Utilizing MRS Innovation Grant dollars a program has been established to give young people with disabilities hands on work experience in waste management allowing them to develop work skills and has the added benefit of increasing their knowledge of the importance of recycling.

The Youth Transition Innovation Grant provides funding for a paid, 8 week work experience that has students working 20 hrs per week sorting various recyclables and learning basic work behaviors in a supervised setting. Some of the participants are school youth and participate in the program as part of their school day receiving credit for their involvement. The school youth are typically from alternative school settings, an emotional impaired classroom, or career center students who have been approved to be released for work experience. Other participants are recent high school graduates who need the work experience before seeking competitive employment.

Youth learn how to follow safety procedures, work as part of a team, and maintain the quality and quantity of work while increasing their understanding of why recycling is important and what materials are recyclable. With the direction of staff implementing the program, at the conclusion of the 8 week experience each student considers their options and builds upon what they have learned to determine their next steps.

Since the initiation of the grant, approximately 26 individuals have participated, 17 have completed the program and are either in the process of job seeking or have secured competitive employment in a variety of occupations.

"Go Green!"



LITE Program Assists Youth on the Autism Spectrum to Achieve Employment

By Stacy Janusz, MRS Rehabilitation Counselor in the Grand Rapids District Office

The LITE program, Learning Independence through Experience, is an employment and collaborative training program with MRS, Goodwill Industries and Grand Valley State University, primarily for young adults with Asperger's Disorder. The program is geared towards ages 18-26 and is designed to teach young adults with Asperger's to work independently on a job and eventually reach self sufficiency.

The program is housed in a postsecondary setting at Grand Valley State University. Students participate in work experiences in one of the many departments on campus for 10-12 weeks. Goodwill Industries provides a job coach, Anthony Centille, who present on site to help customers work on employment skills and especially social skills which is often a challenge for a person with Asperger's.

Individuals begin the process with a tour of the work sites at Grand Valley and then a site is chosen by customer based on their interests and strengths. Some examples of work experiences are working in the book store as a cashier, in the facilities department doing inventory or in the cafeteria as a food service attendant. Sites are continually being explored and developed and presently the team is looking into developing a site in the child care area of campus.

"When all think alike, then no one is thinking."
- Walter Lippman

Candidates participate in an interview with potential departments and if all are in agreement, the customer begins the 10-12 week paid on-the-job evaluation. Nearing completion of the program the job coach, who is also a trained job developer, begins working with customer on job search skills. Upon completion of the 10-12 weeks, if the student has been successful and has demonstrated job readiness, the job developer begins assisting the customer with his or her job search.

The one on one attention that the LITE program provides has proven to be an effective strategy to promote the success of participants. Several young adults with Asperger's who otherwise were unable to find employment, have been able to gain valuable work experience that has set the stage for them to go on to obtain permanent jobs. One student has been hired in on campus and is now an employee of Grand Valley State University and others have been able to find work in a variety of different settings.



Caution ~ Community Partners at Work! Innovation Drives Transition Services in the Grand Traverse Bay Area

By: Bill Colombo, Rehabilitation Counselor, Northern Michigan District Office

Partners in Transition, Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District (TBAISD), Disability Network/ Northern Michigan (DM/MN), and MRS have spent the winter months exploring an improved service delivery model and initiating new programs using Innovation and ARRA funds. The following highlights some of the initiatives currently underway:

Grand Traverse Resort and Spa (GTRS) Hospitality Training Program (Innovation Funds)

- The Program offers a series of educational modules (courses) and hands-on training for participants/ students, all in a supervised setting at GTRS over three weeks.
- Participants/students take part in an employee orientation and have work experiences in housekeeping, laundry, reservations, front desk, stewarding, and quality control.
- A spring training cadre will have similar experiences, plus outdoor maintenance and grounds keeping.
- Upon successful completion, participants/students are awarded a Certificate of Completion. Some students may be hired by GTRS and others can use the certificate to boost their employment chances with similar employers in the area.

Career Tech Center After-Hours & Summer Program (ARRA Funds)

- This project offers an alternative training option for students who struggle to meet the full requirements of current CTC programs, but have the ability to be successful in specialized areas.
- Using the CTC campus/resources, trained special and technical education staff are presenting modified curriculum resulting in a limited but marketable certification.
- The CTC provides access to campus/resources in a non-traditional, after-hours format. This includes both evenings and summer utilization
- If successful, this training option may be made available to adult population groups. The CTC is a valuable community resource and this project may lead to additional utilization.

This is just a snapshot of what's going on "Up-North." To learn more please feel free to call (231) 932-2411 or visit our session, Community Partners, "One Voice," at the MTSA conference.

**"The best way to
have a good idea
is to have a lot of
ideas."
- Dr. Linus Pauling**

SAVE THE DATES

**MTSA Conference
“Re-Imagining Transition”
Bavarian Inn, Frankenmuth, MI
March 17 – 19, 2010**

**“Aspergers Syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorders”
Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center
East Lansing, MI 48824
March 25 – 26, 2010**

**Michigan Developmental Education Consortium
“Then & Now, 25 Years of Developmental Education”
Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center, East Lansing, MI
April 8-9, 2010**

**MI TOP Workshop
Ramada Inn, Lansing, MI
April 22 – 23, 2010**

**MRS Transition Training
Lansing Community College West
5708 Cornerstone Drive
Lansing, MI 48917
August 17, 2010**

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