

Transition Bulletin - Summer Issue

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

MRS Customers with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) on the Rise - Providing Quality Vocational Rehabilitation Services is a Challenge

By Cynthia Wright, MRS Rehabilitation Consultant

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If you are a MRS counselor and you are noticing that the number of individuals on your caseload with ASD seems to be increasing...well it is. The number of individuals in the United States diagnosed with ASD has increased dramatically in recent years. Current data from the United States Department of Education indicate that ASD is increasing at a rate of 10-17% annually (Hendricks, 2010). That means that 1% of all children in the United States are diagnosed with ASD (Eleanor White, MDE/OSE-EIS, Special Education Director, 2011).

Michigan Department of Education/Office of Special Education-Early Intervention Services (MDE/OSE-EIS) has been forecasting for several years that education is on a "seven year bubble" regarding the number of special education students with ASD (START, 2011). At the same time, the Michigan Merit Curriculum has raised the standards for all students to earn a high school diploma, education is facing budget cuts, parent expectations are higher than ever for their children with ASD, and Michigan's unemployment rate is one of the highest in the country at 10.2% (United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (April 2011)).

The unemployment rate for people with ASD cannot be understated. Individuals with ASD have the highest unemployment rate of most disability groups (National Longitudinal Transition Study 2, 2009, www.nlts2.org). There are differing reports regarding the exact unemployment rate for this population. At a START workshop at Clinton RESA in March of 2011, START experts reported that the unemployment rate for individuals with ASD is 94%.

In addition to having a high unemployment rate, Transition youth with ASD are more likely than their peers with other disabilities to work fewer hours per week and more likely to earn a lower hourly wage (McDonough and Revell, 2009).

Given all of these complicating factors, it is fair to say that Michigan citizens with ASD who are seeking employment are facing a "perfect storm." MRS is struggling with the challenge to provide quality vocational supports and services leading to successful employment outcomes for people with ASD. As a result, MRS recently conducted Listening Sessions to determine if there are any gaps in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with ASD. Five MRS districts were involved in the Listening Sessions including Oakland, Traverse City, Ann Arbor, Wayne and Grand Rapids. The following questions were used as probes to gather information:

"...Michigan citizens with ASD who are seeking employment are facing a "perfect storm."

- A. What are the biggest barriers that you face in working with individuals with ASD?
- B. What unique characteristics do individuals with ASD possess that make serving this population challenging?
- C. What knowledge/skill set do you need about individuals with ASD to provide quality vocational rehabilitation services to this population?
- D. What policies create barriers to serving individuals with ASD?
- E. What practices do you use with this population in order to be successful?
- F. What can MCTI do to better support individuals with ASD to be successful?
- G. What advice would you give to Central Office to better support counselors serving individuals with ASD?
- H. Describe in detail the most successful employment outcome that you can remember with a customer with "classic" autism.
- I. Describe in detail the most successful employment outcome that you can remember with a customer with Asperger Syndrome.

Several gaps have been identified including but not limited to:

- Limited support from the Department of Community Health (DCH) for individuals with ASD who are often

assessed to be “too high functioning” to be eligible for DCH supports and services

- Limited amount of MRS counselor time and resources to adequately address the employment needs of individuals with ASD
- Common characteristics of individuals with ASD that create significant barriers to employment
- Counselor knowledge base and skills development opportunities are limited to adequately address the employment needs of MRS customers with ASD

The opportunities to come together to support students with ASD has never been better. There is a lot of media attention and public interest putting ASD in the spotlight. This type of national attention to one specific disability group has not happened in many years (Wehman, 2010). The result of this attention is increased public curiosity, awareness and hopefully sensitivity about people with ASD which may have a positive impact on increasing employment opportunities for individuals with ASD.

“...increased public curiosity, awareness and hopefully sensitivity about people with ASD...”

Education and MRS both have some innovative practices and programs in place that target individuals with ASD. The Statewide Autism Resource and Training Project (START) Education is committed to creating a sustainable structure of support for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders within each region of Michigan by providing training and technical assistance to educators and families that support students on the autism spectrum. Efforts are being made by START to focus more on Transition students.

MRS is trying new and innovative practices to improve employment outcomes. For example, MRS has a very promising Innovation Project where individuals with autism are participating in work experiences at Grand Valley State University. This project is demonstrating promising outcomes (MRS Grand Rapids District Office 2009-2011). Another Innovation Project called the GECKO program had positive results using iTouches to prompt, remind and support students with developmental disabilities (including ASD) to be successful on their work experiences. One of the reported benefits of this program is that students have required less job coaching (MRS Lansing District Office 2009-2010).

As a result of the listening sessions that were conducted, MRS in partnership with the Asperger Society of Michigan, is bringing Gail Hawkins to speak at the MRS Summer Transition Training and Networking Workshop. An announcement and an article about the workshop including information about Gail can be found in this publication of the Transition Bulletin.

MRS Transition Training Returns

By Shelly Neal, MRS Counselor Ann Arbor District Office and Transition Training Design Team Participant

Last year, 125 Transition counselors gathered in Lansing for a day of training that focused on challenges that MRS is facing in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to Transition students. We are excited to announce the second MRS Summer Transition Training and Networking Workshop to be held on August 2, 2011 at Lansing Community College MI-TECH.

Last year, presenters from Statewide Autism Resources and Training (START) from Grand Valley State University shared information about the dramatic increase of students that will be headed to MRS counselors in the near future. To address this issue, we are excited to announce that Gail Hawkins from the Hawkins Institute in Ontario will be our keynote speaker. She has also agreed to do two breakout sessions on communication challenges and social skills challenges. The Hawkins Institute has a 98% placement rate with their customer on the autism spectrum. We are looking forward to learning strategies to assist our customers to be successful in employment.

Break-out sessions include: motivating customers to stay involved, updates on MMC, Transition policy issues and Transition customers.

Other breakouts include motivation for our customers to stay involved in the rehabilitation process, updates on the Michigan Merit Curriculum and how it is impacting our youth customers, Transition policy issues, and a panel of some Transition customers that will share their perspective about their Transition experience and what impacted upon them the most. Another important part of the day will be networking. There will be time on the agenda for both structured and unstructured networking. This will allow you an opportunity to find out what others are doing around the state and share your ideas as well.

Be sure to be a part of this important training. Check with your manager if you can attend and register on E-Learn. Transition counselors have this one time of year to gather and share information, stories, successes, and challenges. Be sure that you are a part of this by registering for the training. See you on August 2nd in Lansing.

Highlights of the Michigan Department of Education/Office of Special Education-Early Intervention Services (MDE/OSE-EIS) and Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) Inter-agency Agreement

By Cynthia Wright, MRS Rehabilitation Consultant

MRS is in the process of rolling out the MDE/OSE-EIS and MRS Interagency Agreement that was updated and signed on March 1, 2011. The agreement renews the commitment between the two departments to provide Transition services to students, focuses on the mandates that each party is responsible for as directed by IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act, and identifies practices where both parties could find agreement. This article focuses on highlights of the agreement that are important to know about.

One area of concern relates to **Confidentiality**. Both Education and MRS has the responsibility to obtain written informed consent of the parent or legal guardian of each student, or from the student if they are 18 or older and their own legal guardian, before releasing information verbally or on record. MRS is able to meet with students to provide general MRS information or to provide MRS Orientations without written consent. However, prior to the provision of direct MRS services or supports, MRS must obtain written informed consent.

Another practice that relates to confidentiality that is addressed in the agreement is that under the IDEA, Education must obtain written informed consent before a MRS counselor is invited to attend an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting for a student.

Student Documentation is addressed in the agreement specifying that after written informed consent is obtained, the referring school staff will provide student documentation to assist MRS to determine student eligibility for MRS services, perform a needs assessment and conduct vocational planning. Every effort should be made to ensure that vocationally relevant information is provided to MRS to avoid duplication of efforts.

Student **Eligibility** is another highlight of the agreement in that the agreement clarifies that each student who is eligible for special education services may not be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services and each student who is eligible for vocational rehabilitation services may not be eligible for special education services. Education and MRS each has its own criteria and process to determine eligibility.

Because Education operates under an entitlement model, and MRS operates under an eligibility model, the agreement states that efforts will be made on the part of MDE/OSE-EIS and MRS to prepare students and families for the shift from entitlement to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment to the eligibility model for MRS services.

Attendance at IEP Meetings is covered in the agreement. Under IDEA, Education is required to invite any agency to the IEP if it is anticipated that that agency is likely to provide or pay for services for the student. To support this mandate, the agreement states that MDE/OSE-EIS and MRS both acknowledge the importance of attendance at the IEP team meeting. MRS agrees to make every effort to attend the student IEP for eligible MRS customers.

Emphasis is placed on **Seamless Transition Services** for our mutual students/customers. Under the IDEA, the transition planning document is the IEP and under the Rehabilitation Act, the transition planning document is the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The IEP must include measurable postsecondary goals (vision) and the IPE is a vocational plan that identifies an individualized job goal and delineates the supports and services that will assist the individual to reach their employment goal.

Addressed in the agreement is that MRS will consider a student's IEP when developing the student's IPE. For student planning purposes the student may have an active IEP and active IPE at the same time. It is best when both documents are coordinated and outlines activities and services (including MRS, special education and related/support services) necessary for the student to move toward obtaining their post-school employment goal. The IEP and the IPE documents specify who is responsible to provide specific supports and services. Both plans provide individualized transition services based on the student's needs, priorities, strengths, preferences, abilities, aptitudes

and interests. Additionally, services provided, arranged for or purchased, in support of the MRS IPE, will be based upon student informed choice.

Information about different options to achieve **Coordination of Resources** is delineated in the agreement. The agreement recognizes that meeting the individual needs of youth dually eligible for special education services and MRS services requires resource sharing and coordination. Quality student-centered planning requires shared responsibility and coordination of resources. When MRS resource sharing options are utilized, they are not to be used to replace services that are the responsibility of MDE/OSE-EIS as directed by IDEA. Personnel and financial resources may be shared among Education and MRS to address the transition employment needs of youth with disabilities under three defined options:

“Personnel and financial resources may be shared among Education and MRS...”

- Transfer of Funds (Cash Match) Agreements
- Third Party Cooperative Staffing Arrangements (Certified Expenditures)
- Donations and Gifts

Lastly, another highlight of the agreement pertains to **504 Students** by recognizing that 504 students may be eligible for MRS even though they are not eligible for special education services. When MRS receives referrals from 504 students, the referrals are treated the same as any MRS applicant with the exception that there is no special education involvement with that student.

If there is interest in having a deeper discussion about implications and practices relating to the new agreement, please contact Cynthia Wright at wrightc1@michigan.gov or at (517) 241-3957.

MRS District Manager Inspires Development of Drop-Out Prevention Program

By Venita King, MRS Oakland District Manager

Marcie Alling and I attended a High School drop-out prevention seminar, along with other human service and school personnel in Oakland County last year. At that time we learned how students, including those with disabilities, “slide out” of High School. The startling statistics and information that was disseminated was alarming. The information confirmed that many students with disabilities drop-out of High School for a whole host of reasons, not necessarily related to academic performance, even though the new High School graduation requirements are making it more difficult. While some of the individuals do enroll in alternative programs, the other issues affecting their staying in High School are rarely addressed. I started thinking about how MRS could assist with transition for those students “on the slide” and positively affect the drop-out rate for students with disabilities in Oakland County.

“...positively affect the drop-out rate for students with disabilities in Oakland County.”

I contacted the Oakland Intermediate School District (OISD) as well as my Disability Network Oakland Macomb (DNOM) partner, (by the way I have AWESOME partners) and we talked about giving students information that would hopefully help them make choices about their future and equip them with independent living skills so they would stay the course to graduate High School. As a result, a 60 hour curriculum was developed. The EQ3 (**Equip, Energize, Empower**) program, facilitated by DNOM program, is very specific and includes 60 hours of face-to-face group activities and discussion around the following subjects: advocacy, empowerment, independent living skills, rights and responsibilities, finance and budgeting, personal safety, vocational readiness, information and referrals, peer counseling, and finally job placement. Due to the cost, it is designed to be delivered over no more than a semester at the school site to eliminate transportation barriers. As we started talking about how we would pilot it, alternative schools came to mind as these students seemed to already be on the “slide.” The program is ideally designed for 10-12 students and we fund it with both dedicated IL funds and OISD Cash Match funds.

We have completed EQ3 at (2) alternative schools. If those schools decide to continue a second year, they will need to provide match dollars and we will soon start those discussions. We are currently reviewing lessons learned and best practices and planning to start EQ3 at a new school in the fall. The Macomb District liked the program and will be piloting a program in that county in the fall.

Graphic Communications at the Michigan Career and Technical Institute (MCTI) Has New Technology to Train Students for Jobs!

By Patty Miller-Kramer, Executive Director for the Pine Lake Fund at MCTI

There are employment opportunities for students in the Printing Industry in the State of Michigan. The MCTI Graphics Communications department is training students to fill those jobs. Printing is often a behind the scenes process in many companies and customers don't necessarily think of a career in the field when asked about their interests. On-campus training can be 1-5 terms. There are employment opportunities in most **metropolitan** areas of the state.

Recent technology upgrades to the program include:

- *A customer service oriented copy center with both high-speed black and white and color copiers*
- *Significant expansion of the screen printing area with a new screen exposure unit and multi-color press*
- *Computer to printing plate technology*
- *New Heidelberg two color press with automatic plate loaders*

The new Heidelberg press enables the program to demonstrate advanced technology to its students, as well as facilitate the training department's ability to produce a variety of printed materials for MCTI and other state government agencies.

"Heidelberg machines are built well, take a lot of abuse, and last forever," said Jeff Mount, one of two instructors in the program. "From a career standpoint," he added, "the new Heidelberg press is a fixture in the majority of shops where program graduates gain employment, so being able to train on that particular press is a real plus for them."



Founded in 1944, MCTI serves adult students with disabilities from all over Michigan, with a goal of career education and subsequent placement in the workplace. MCTI has 14 vocational training areas: Automotive Technology, Cabinetmaking/Millwork, Certified Nursing Assistant, Culinary Arts, Custodial, Customer Service, Electronics Servicing, Grounds Maintenance, Office Automation, Machine Technology, Graphic Communications, Pharmacy Tech, Retail Marketing and Weatherization.

MCTI is a program under the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs-Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS). The mission of MRS is to assist individuals with disabilities to achieve employment and self-sufficiency. MRS provides job preparation, job placement, job retention, and independent living services for more than 45,000 residents of Michigan with disabilities annually.

Graphic Communications Program

Career Choices – Certificate of Completion Programs

- ◆ Screen Printer
- ◆ Bindery/Finishing Worker
- ◆ Press Assistant

Depending on skills, abilities, and interests, students can participate from 1-3 terms

Program Description

MCTI's Graphic Communications Program is run like a print shop. In this production environment, students develop job competencies, while operating specialized printing equipment to produce brochures, business cards, forms, and other printing for the school and various other organizations.

Job Outlook

Jobs are plentiful in this industry and skilled graduates can expect job placement within a short period of time. Entry-

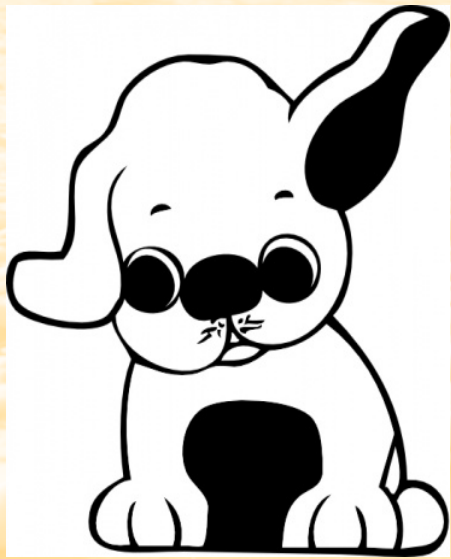
level wages vary from \$7.30–\$10 per hour and are dependent on geographical area.

Aptitude/Abilities

- ◆ Average mechanical, manual dexterity, motor coordination
- ◆ Computer literate, numeric, color and form perception
- ◆ Task planning/organizing, attention to detail
- ◆ Ability to perform a variety of tasks
- ◆ Ability to execute precision work
- ◆ Physically demanding
- ◆ Academic abilities are detailed in the MCTI catalog & on the MCTI website

Michigan Career and Technical Institute (MCTI)
Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS)
Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA)
11611 West Pine Lake Road
Plainwell, MI 49080
Toll Free 1-877-901-7360
TTY 1-269-664-9294
www.michigan.gov/mcti





Have you heard?

MRS Transition Training
August 2, 2011
Lansing Community College MI-TECH
5708 Cornerstone Drive
Lansing, MI 48917
9:00am-3:30 pm

Training is for MRS counseling staff (civil service and blended) serving transition caseloads. The training will:

- Address achieving employment outcomes with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Provide opportunities for networking and sharing
- Offer breakout sessions in targeted areas

Please seek prior approval from your manager.
Details and registration for this event are available on E-Learn.



SAVE THE DATES

MRS Summer Transition Training & Networking Workshop
Lansing Community College MI-TECH
5708 Cornerstone Drive
Lansing, MI 48917
August 2, 2011

Michigan Rehab Conference-Think Beyond the Label
DeVos Place, Amway Grand Plaza Hotel
303 Monroe Avenue Northwest
Grand Rapids, MI 49503-2233

MTSA Conference
Bavarian Inn
713 South Main Street
Frankenmuth, MI 48734-1694
March 14-16, 2012

MI-TOP Workshop
Ramada Inn Hotel & Conference Center
7501 W. Saginaw Highway
Lansing, MI 48917
October 20 & 21, 2011

MI-TOP Workshop
Ramada Inn Hotel & Conference Center
7501 W. Saginaw Highway
Lansing, MI 48917

MI-TOP Workshop
Ramada Inn Hotel & Conference Center
7501 W. Saginaw Highway
Lansing, MI 48917
April 19 & 20, 2012

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