

Transition Bulletin - Fall Issue

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

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MCTI Alternative Energy Students Chosen for Co-op Project on WMU's Engineering Campus

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

Two students from the Michigan Career and Technical Institute (MCTI) were chosen to participate in a large 50KW Solar Array project at Western Michigan University's (WMU) Engineering Campus. Patrick Preston and Robert King were among students interviewed from MCTI, Grand Valley State University and WMU.

Solar Winds LLC, a west Michigan based company that installs solar panels, is supervising the project. As part of their co-op, Patrick and Robert are installing conduit and wiring for the installation of 12 poles that will hold 10 solar panels each. The solar panels are set up to make 50KW per hour and last up to 100 years. The project panels are visible going north on US 131 between the Stadium Drive and West Main exits.

Phill Schmitt, MCTI Electronics Alternative Energy Instructor says, "This is a great opportunity for students to get hands-on experiences with renewable energy." Schmitt connected with Solar Winds, LLC at the Pierce Cedar Creek Renewable Energy Conference in February. MCTI's Electronics Alternative Energy Option is a three-term course. The first term is DC electronics, the second term is AC electronics and the third term covers several areas in Alternative Energy: solar, wind, fuel cells, microhydro and biofuels. Students can get two certifications from MCTI: PV Solar Installer Certification and Small Wind Turbine Installer Certification.

MCTI is a state-operated, residential, career training center located on the shores of Pine Lake in southwest Michigan, under the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs - Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS).

MCTI's vocational training areas include: Automotive Technology, Cabinetmaking/Millwork, Culinary Arts, Custodial, Customer Service, Electronics Servicing, Grounds Maintenance, Office Automation, Machine Technology, Certified Nursing Assistant, Graphic Communications, Pharmacy, Retail Marketing and Building Services (Weatherization).



MRS Counselors and Managers Connect and Learn at the MRS Transition Training and Networking Workshop

By Cynthia Wright, MRS Rehabilitation Consultant

On August 2nd, MRS Transition staff came together at Lansing Community College for the second year for a day of learning and networking. A design team, consisting of MRS counselors and Central Office staff, planned the workshop based on the needs of field staff. Over 130 people attended the training from all over the state.

Design Team participants played an important role in identifying areas for discussion for this year's training.

Members of the Design Team were: Kathryn Flagstad, Shelly Neal, Andre Nevils, Nickco Dixon, Lawana Williams, Maureen Webster, Melissa Harding, Rebecca Hill and Rick Webster. One of the focuses of this years training was improving employment services to MRS customers with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Gail Hawkins (of the Hawkins Institute) was the keynote speaker and presented two breakout sessions as well. In Gail's keynote, "Through the Side Door," Gail described how she approaches the challenges of individuals with ASD and gains entry into their experience to achieve high job placement and retention rates. Gail shared strategies that lead to success and also shared strategies that she uses to connect with families. One of the participants commented on their evaluation that, "Gail Hawkins was outstanding. The entire program was informative."



Justin Vedin attends Gail Hawkins' breakout session focusing on helping individuals with autism spectrum disorders to develop workplace social skills.

Gail's breakouts included "Social Skills" and "Communication Skills" for individuals with ASD. In these sessions Gail shared practical techniques for improving eye contact, greetings and social interactions in the workplace. Many of the techniques that Gail shared are interventions that can be implemented by counselors right away. One of the counselors wrote the following on the evaluation, "Gail was excellent and I really liked how she gave concrete tools to use with customers."

Other issues that the design team identified that were addressed in the training included:

- Transition customer stories
- Michigan Merit Curriculum/Local Certificates of Completion
- Transition Customer Motivation for Employment
- School Documents
- MRS Transition Policy
- Postsecondary Options and Outcomes
- MDE/OSE-EIS and MRS Interagency Agreement
- MT-21 Updates

Last year counselors told us in their evaluations that they wanted more time for networking. Becky Hill has written an article in this issue of the bulletin about the Structured Networking sessions.

Overall the workshop went very well. Thanks to the design team for working so hard to make the training meaningful, relevant and informative.

Structured Networking: "I just want a job!"

By Becky Hill, MRS Transition Counselor in the Kalamazoo District Office

This was my first year as a design team member for the Summer Transition Training and Networking Workshop. One of our tasks in designing this year's workshop was to review what was done last year; what worked well and what could we improve on. The design team spent time considering the comments and feedback from last year's evaluations.

One theme from the Transition counselors who attended last year was the desire for *more networking*

time. It's so rare that Transition counselors from all over the state are awarded this opportunity to not only be in the same room as other Transition counselors, but also to network and take home information about what other counselors are doing and what might work well in your home area.

Following is background information into how the break-out sessions and structured networking sessions were chosen for the workshop.

The design team met to try to answer the questions: 'How will networking go with a large group?' and, 'What topics do we want to network about?' To answer these questions, the design team did a Discovery Activity in a carousel fashion. We rotated around the room writing our thoughts on the following questions:

1. What is the most challenging aspect of your job that impacts upon your ability to produce positive Transition outcomes?
2. What emerging issues are you facing that need to be addressed at the MRS Summer Transition Training and Networking Workshop?
3. The MRS Summer Transition Training and Networking Workshop will include MRS Transition staff from all over the state.
 - What issues, programs, practices, resources, etc, would you like to learn or dialogue about with other MRS counselors?
 - What Transition policies do you need clarification about?
 - What skills do you hope to walk away with?

Then we reviewed the design team's responses to these questions, and put STARS(*) by the ones most important to us.

The topics with the most stars resulted in both break-out sessions for the day, and also as the 8 Structured Networking Sessions.

The 8 Structured Networking topics were:

1. Work experience
2. Continuing education and training after high school
3. Community supports
4. "I just want a job"
5. School documents
6. Technology
7. Appropriate referrals
8. Vocational counseling with transition customers.

Workshop attendees could choose which networking session they wanted to attend, and could rotate every 10 minutes and visit up to 4 topic areas. Or, you could stay in one topic area if you wanted to network longer than 10 minutes.

The topic area I facilitated was "I just want a job": How do you help your customers that just want a job achieve quality outcomes?

It was so interesting to hear the variety of feedback on this topic! Some counselors who are presented with transition students who *just want a job* say that they limit the amount of evaluations they arrange for the customer and focus their time on direct job placement. Some counselors stated that they may still arrange a Trial Work or Work Assessment if it is the customer's first job. If the student has the potential to benefit from further training, some counselors said they may present info on MCTI or community college to maximize their employment potential. Recurring themes included: listen to the customer, ask a lot of

questions, and don't rush our (MRS) agenda. My personal favorite response to this question was a counselor being excited for a potential "easy rehab!"

The feedback provided in the evaluations of the day showed a positive reaction to this time to network about various topics: *What was the best thing about today?*

- ◆ "The structured networking topics were beneficial and interesting."
- ◆ "Hearing what other people are doing."
- ◆ "I really liked the structured networking – excellent idea!"
- ◆ "Various types of structured networking"

Some attendees wanted more time for the structured networking and to focus on fewer topic areas. The design team for the 2012 Transition Workshop will review the feedback and organize next year's event to meet the needs of as many as possible. From the 2011 Design Team, we hope you walked away with information that you didn't have before you came to the Workshop; met some new faces in Transition; and are rejuvenated to start a new school year!



Vanessa Neilley, Melissa Harding and Sharon Bryant from the MRS Flint District Office take five after presenting their breakout, 'Transition Customer Motivation for Employment.'

Michigan Rehabilitation Services – Transition Services & Policy

By Karsten Bekemeier, MRS Policy Consultant

On August 2, 2011, the Policy Unit staff presented a question and answer session for the MRS Transition Training & Networking Workshop. While the MRS policy for the provision of services for individuals enrolled in MRS has not substantially changed, the application of these policies in light of other agency and school practices continues to be a challenge. From the graduation requirements and impact on future college cases, to that of simply classifying in AWARE what category an individual represents can be challenging.

While this article will not be a complete detail of all of the policy related challenges that a school transition caseload may contain, it is hopeful that in the least it will be a reminder to utilize the Policy Unit for interpretation and implications of changing regulations and the potential impact on MRS policy. Essentially the Policy Unit has three means by which to become informed of practices and needs from a policy perspective. The first is a 'top-down' approach, whereby the Rehabilitation Service Administration will inform us of changes or needs for policy adjustments. However, this is on a national basis and often will lag behind that of individual State practices. The second is through the case review process. However, this is essentially to identify current practices based on current knowledge. The third, and by far most critical means by which potential concerns and impact of practices are identified, is from feedback from you.

Questions from the field are typically some of the first indicators that there is a developing practice that may impact or need a policy interpretation. It is through the diligence of our counselors that such implications are noted and solutions begin to be generated. With this in mind, please contact the policy unit if and when such challenges present themselves.

With that said, there are some policy changes/updates that will be taking place during the next several months including but not limited to:

- Clarification and consistent referencing of the Career Pathways language within the sections of policy that reference it;
- New definitions of “Transition Youth” and “Young Adult” will be incorporated in the applicable policy;
- The Data Dictionary will be updated to reflect change to the dropdown menu for “Transition Program Participant” field on the application page and;
- Updated policy reflecting timelines for entering the IPE into AWARE within 7 calendar days of signature.

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Transition Students Tell Their Story

By Rick Webster, MRS Counselor in the Grand Rapids District Office

One of the highlights from the August 2nd Transition Training and Networking Workshop was a breakout session where four Transition students shared their personal journeys toward employment. This session was coordinated and facilitated by Rick Webster, MRS counselor in the Grand Rapids District Office.

While counselors listened, students described their personal experiences in the transition process beginning in grade school through their current situation. All have graduated from high school, and have had training, or are currently in training provided by a community based-rehabilitation organization, MCTI, or 4-year university.



On several occasions, the students expressed that they had good family support, which greatly influenced their success both in school and training. All the students have demonstrated good work ethic, plus a variety of work and volunteer experiences. There was great discussion and diversity regarding the variety of special education/support services provided by their secondary schools.

When leaving the session one of the counselors stated, “I loved hearing from the students... that was a great session!” The evaluations seemed to echo this counselor’s sentiments as the session was rated very high by all participants. One individual wrote on their evaluation, “I would like to hear the Transition Youth Panel again and possibly include the parents too.”

MRS customers tell their Transition stories at the workshop.

***A Special Thank You to the
Counselors that Served on the
Design Team!!!***

Andre Nevils

Nickeo Dixon

Kathy Flagstadt

Lawana Williams

Melissa Harding



Becky Hill

Maureen Webster

Rich Webster

Shelly Neal

Bayyinah Robinson

SAVE THE DATES

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

Michigan Rehab Conference-Think Beyond the Label
DeVos Place, Amway Grand Plaza Hotel
303 Monroe Avenue Northwest
Grand Rapids, MI 49503-2233
October 26-28, 2011

MI-TOP Workshop
Ramada Inn Hotel & Conference Center
7501 W. Saginaw Highway
Lansing, MI 48917
January 26 and 27, 2012

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
April 19 & 20, 2012

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E-mail your contributions or ideas and subscription requests for "Transition Bulletin" to Cynthia Wright wrightc1@michigan.gov or call 517-241-3957

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