



Transition Bulletin - Fall Issue



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

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Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) Summer Training Brings MRS Staff Together to Learn and Network about Transition Youth Services

By the MRS Summer Transition Training Design Team

The design team offers reflections and thanks.

Lou Adams kicked off the MRS Summer Transition Training with a warm welcome that was full of updates and forecasts. Included in his welcome address was a heads-up about the Promise Grant that was recently submitted and a prediction about the reauthorization of the Rehab Act that will raise expectations regarding the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to Transition Youth. Thanks for making time to attend the workshop and welcoming us Lou!

Su Pi, from MSU Project Excellence, along with her PhD students, shared the Michigan Technology for the 21st Century (MT-21) data that they gathered over the past year. The data reflects promising and emerging Transition practices in Michigan. Su and the students also shared this presentation at the national level this month at the Vocational Rehabilitation Evaluation and Quality Assurance Summit in Providence, Rhode Island. Way to go Su and team for putting Michigan on the map!

Along with announcing his retirement, Chuck Saur, Director of the Michigan Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP), shared the data portal that will provide easy access to local and statewide data related to transition issues and help us in answering the questions:

- 1) Are we doing what is necessary to prepare students to belong and succeed in their community?
- 2) Is their community ready to support them in belonging and succeeding in reaching their post-secondary goals?
- 3) How do we know?

Thanks for your commitment to Transition Chuck, both personally and professionally. You will be missed.

Dave Malott, MRS Liaison to MI-TOP, talked about a website concept that will provide a framework for discussions between Educators and Transition Service Providers about working together to prepare students to succeed in reaching their post-secondary goals. This site will provide access to best practice examples, other resources and research on what others have found to work.



The MT-21 team (from left to right) Trent Landon, Hyesuk Jang, Sukyeong Pi, Marwa Alsaman, Jinhee Park, and Lou Adams, MRS Acting Director, presented at the MRS Summer Transition Training.





Mayra Lopez told her Transition story at the Transition Training and is pictured with her counselor Alan Todd.

Paul Mulka offered MCTI updates and a vision for the future. Thanks Paul for being supportive of Transition efforts and for keeping us all in the loop regarding MCTI.

The evaluations reflected positively on all of the breakouts. Ranked highest was Sue Zwyghuizen's presentation regarding the MCTI PERT Program that was piloted this summer that offered comprehensive vocational and independent living assessments for in-school youth. Take a bow Sue Z, well done!

To wrap up the day's activities, three MRS student customers bravely shared their Transition stories with seriousness, humor and pride. A special thanks to these customers and their counselors (Rick Webster, Grand Rapids; Alan Todd, Porter Street; and Tabitha Haag, Waterford) for sharing their experience and coordinating this event. The evaluations ranked this particular session as the highest of all the sessions. Much appreciation to the customers and counselors for all of your efforts!

Rick Webster, the longest standing member of the design team, stated, "Congratulations on such a magnificent training! What an achievement, a wonderful, uplifting & inspiring day with truly groundbreaking ideas, workshop ideas and presentations. It was very evident that all enjoyed the speakers and student presenters. We need to continue to create not only respect, credibility and status, but to see the 'transition' message genuinely transform the current practices and options in services provided to our youth/customers with disabilities."

Alan Todd served on the design team for the second year in a row and affirmed that, "Each design team member contributed new and innovative ideas, and facilitated a new role in shaping how successful the 2013 MRS Summer Transition Training was. Each year adds new ideas and insights on how to enrich and make the Transition Training better. I look forward to continuing my role in making the MRS Summer Transition Trainings better and more rewarding for each year to come."

Tabitha Haag is new to MRS and contributed a fresh perspective to the design process. Tabitha states, "It was a great learning experience. I enjoyed meeting staff and sharing Transition experiences from around the state."

Lastly, thanks to the Training Unit for continuing to support the MRS Summer Transition Workshop. Margie and Sigrid, thanks a million for your support.

All the PowerPoint presentations that were presented are available for reference on E-Learn. Thanks Carole Sheppard for your assistance in making the PowerPoints available to all.

Michigan Transition Services Association (MTSA) and MRS Collaborate for the Second Year to Make Funds Available for Work-Based Learning

By Beth Nemeth, MTSA President



The mission of MTSA is to provide support to its membership to assist students and young adults with disabilities as they Transition through school to achieve their post-school goals. MTSA is a well-established, statewide nonprofit organization that reaches out to those individuals and community partners involved in providing Transition services for students receiving special education services, and for persons sharing concerns and interests of those students and the Association. MTSA has an independent board and subcommittees that work on specific goals each year including the MTSA yearly conference in Frankenmuth, Michigan.

MRS is heavily invested in serving youth with 32% of customers being either Transition Youth or Young Adults. MTSA and MRS share a joint focus to ensure that students with disabilities have a quality life after graduating/exiting the education system. Specifically, MTSA and MRS have a common interest in the area of achieving employment outcomes for young people with disabilities.

Last year, MTSA donated funds to MRS to leverage resources that resulted in \$64,000 for work-based learning programs. Two programs were funded, one in Hillsdale County and another in Kent County.

As a result of the success of the first year of the collaboration between MTSA and MRS, the MTSA board voted to donate funds to MRS for a second year and increased the donation by \$25,000. This generous donation allows MRS to capture additional federal funds resulting in a total budget of \$92,593 which will allow for three projects at \$30,864.33 each.

Work-based learning will remain the focus of the funds because there is ample research demonstrating that school-age youth with disabilities are much more likely to achieve an employment outcome if they participate in a paid or unpaid work experience while in high school. Therefore, the focus of the project is to create programs that accomplish this goal. Work-based learning is a broad continuum of services that may include career exploration opportunities, paid or unpaid work experience, summer employment, internships, etc.

In order for a project to be considered and ultimately awarded funds, a team approach is required between Education and MRS. Last year, two projects were not able to be considered because they lacked signatures from both local school staff and the MRS staff connected with that school.

To access the paperwork to submit a proposal, please go to the MTSA website at <http://www.michigantsa.com/> or contact Cynthia Wright, MRS Consultant, at wrightc1@michigan.gov.

Collaborative Transition Practices Create Work-based Learning Opportunities For Students with Disabilities

By Cynthia Wright, MRS Consultant

In recent months students with disabilities have participated in several work-based learning opportunities. This is a result of Intermediate and Regional School Districts, MTSA, Department of Natural Resources-Parks and Recreation Division (DNR-PRD), MRS, community rehabilitation organizations, Michigan Works! and employers partnering, planning and implementing joint programming.



Last year MTSA donated funds to MRS which allowed MRS to draw down federal matching dollars. These funds were used to create programming for students in Hillsdale and Kent Counties. In addition, the DNR donated funds to Intermediate and Regional School Districts in Michigan to create a fund source with MRS for summer employment for students across Michigan in state parks. This article describes these programs and shares available outcomes.

Hillsdale County – Transition and Training Summer Initiative (T&T)

T&T was developed to address the issue of students exiting secondary education with a Certificate of Completion and facing a job market with limited employment opportunities. In 2012, only 1 out of 28 of these students became employed after high school.

As a result of this dilemma, Hillsdale ISD, MRS (including MCTI), Key Opportunities and South Central Michigan Works! (SCMW), and local employers came together to create a program targeting 20 students (ages 16-19) one year prior to their exit from high school that offers:

- Employability skills development;
- Independent living assessment;
- Comprehensive vocational assessment (PERT);
- Work experience; and
- Employer verified credential.

During the six week summer program, students first received two weeks of prevocational skills training in the classroom. After this was completed, students then attended the Michigan Career and Technical Institute (MCTI) in Plainwell, Michigan where the students participated in comprehensive vocational and independent living assessments. Upon returning back to their community the students engaged in a three week paid work-experience in a business.

This fall, the students will be able to integrate what they learned from this program into their Individual Educational Program (IPE) and their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

T&T began implementation this past summer. To date, 12 students have benefitted from some aspect of the program, 9 received the comprehensive vocational and independent living assessments at MCTI, 14 students participated in the paid work-experience and 1 student is employed as a result of the program.

Kent County – Achieving Competitive Employment (ACE) Project

In Region 1 of Kent County a gap was identified in an existing career development program (RITS) for students with disabilities. RITS provides Transition Specific support for students/families/staff from the seven school districts in Northern Kent County: Cedar Springs, Comstock Park, Kenowa Hills, Kent City, Northview, Rockford and Sparta. This program supports students to develop and hone work skills, but in the past three years, students had a 25% chance of becoming competitively employed. The program was lacking a strong connection from the school work program to community employment. Students had poor follow-through, lacked employer connections and were not seamlessly transitioning from school to work.

To address this gap, Region 1/Kent County, Goodwill Industries of Greater Grand Rapids and MRS



(Grand Rapids District Office) joined forces to create a program that targets 30 students to provide a minimum of 40 work-based learning opportunities, ultimately resulting in 22 students achieving employment. To accomplish these outcomes, students received the services and supports of a specialized job coach to establish relationships while they are still in high school; job development, job coaching and follow-along supports were included in the process. Some outreach to the local districts is also being done to provide work-based learning opportunities to students who will not be attending RITS because they will be obtaining a high school diploma.

The ACE Project started implementation in February of 2013. To date, 16 students are being served by the project and 10 students have become employed as a result.

DNR – PRD Project

This past summer, 80+ students with disabilities gained paid work experience by working for 8 weeks in 16 Michigan State Parks. This was accomplished through a partnership between MRS, DNR-PRD, local Intermediate School Districts/Regional Education Service Agency (ISD/RESA) and local community rehabilitation organizations. The parks covered rural and urban areas including: Presque Isle, Brimley, Young, Traverse City, Interlochen, Spring Lake, South Higgins, Hartwick Pines, Ludington, Muskegon, Hoffmaster, Ionia, Island Lake, Pinckney and Sleeper.

In addition to the paid work experience, students received on-site job coaching and assistance with work-related expenses such as transportation and work clothes.

Outcomes for this project are yet to be seen as students are still in high school and will be seeking employment in the next few years.

Common Themes

Work-based learning opportunities for high school students are more difficult to provide because of the implementation of the Michigan Merit Curriculum and increasingly tight budgets. The highlighted projects have some commonalities that contribute to their success including:

- **Individualized Student Supports** – Projects focus on creating experiences for students with disabilities with individualized supports and services to meet the needs of each student.
- **Mutual Benefit** – The collaborative nature of the project designs are to consider and meet the needs of multiple stakeholders including students, education, MTSA, MRS, and businesses.
- **Shared Vision** – After identifying the interests of all parties, a common vision was established for the programs with clear goals, objectives and outcome measures.
- **Research-based practices** – Work-based learning is known to be a critical experience to lay the foundation for future employment for students with disabilities.
- **Shared resources/capacity building** – Scarce resources are pooled to maximize benefits of all.



DNR Creates Summer Job Opportunities for Youth with 'Barrier to Employment'

By Karen Bota, Staff Writer, (karen.bota@sentinel-standard.com), Sentinel-Standard

Five area youths who may have had a tough time finding summer work are gaining job skills at the Ionia State Recreation Area, thanks to a partnership between the Ionia Intermediate School District (ISD), Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS).

When jobs are hard to come by, even for the most experienced workers, youths have to compete for entry level positions against more seasoned competition. "It's even more of a challenge when young people have a disability characteristic that is a barrier to employment," said Rick Webster, vocational counselor at MRS. Enter the DNR Summer Work Experience program, which has been done elsewhere in the state, but was introduced to Ionia County this year.

For the past four weeks, and with four more to go, five young adults ages 18 to 20 have been working at the Ionia State Recreation Area doing a variety of tasks from trailblazing, clearing out picnic areas and campsites, and painting, to cleaning bathrooms and maintenance buildings.

These positions serve as stepping stones for students to establish a work history, gain experience, and develop basic employability skills required for successful adulthood. "They get paid, and walk away with good solid work experience, displaying good work ethic, cooperation with other coworkers, and a lot of duties other than they ever expected when they got into this – especially when it's 100 degrees out there and they'd love to go jump in the (Sessions) lake," Webster said. The youth also are benefiting from some less tangible experiences that come with holding a job, and this is valuable, too, said Webster.

"They're getting up earlier in the summer – earlier than their friends – and getting a good rest at night after working hard all day. You know (about that), and I know, but they didn't know until now," he said. "They're also developing relationships with the DNR staff."

The young workers are supervised by a job coach, Stacey Doran, who also is an employment training specialist at Lakewood High School. Doran provides individualized mentoring and evaluates each employee's performance, giving feedback all along the way. She coordinates work activity with the DNR Ionia unit supervisor, Sean Mulligan.

"One of the big benefits of the program is these young adults haven't had an adequate amount of training on a job site," Doran said. "I work a lot with employability skills – what are you doing and how will this affect your employability in the future?"

Doran works with employees on the need to communicate with their employers and co-workers, "to say 'I'm done doing this; what's next?'" she said. "I tell them to remember to ask questions, and if you don't understand, ask them to explain. That way, they don't get fired over something they just plain didn't understand."

The program is working out well, said Doran. The workers follow through, even if they have to do



something they don't particularly like. They also are learning to work independently – to keep busy and to look around them for other tasks that may need to be done. "These are physically tough jobs, and they pull through it," she said.

After this summer experience, some of the employees will move into a regular job placement. Others will go on to college or a vocational training school. Nickolis Ferris, 19, an Ionia High School (IHS) grad, plans to attend Baker College in Owosso for two years, starting in the fall. He hopes to become a DNR officer. "At first, I wanted to be a zoologist, but I don't have the money for school, so I had to come up with another idea," Ferris explained. "As a DNR officer, I'm still outside doing things."

Mike Blake, 18, returns to IHS as a senior in the fall. "We get to work outside. It's hot, so we're drinking lots of water," Blake said. "It's a good program. We get to work with all the employees, and learn team work. I'll try to use that for some other jobs."



DNR Summer Work Experience participants; Blake Stemler (right) and Nickolis Ferris pose with Stacey Doran, their job coach, Rick Webster, MRS counselor, and the state park crew at Ionia State Recreation Area.

The DNR Summer Work Experience is a win-win situation for the workers and their employer, Webster said, noting that the DNR contributed \$2,000. With the Ionia ISD's contribution, that amount grew to \$8,500. "That's enough to give (youths) a paid job and also pay for the job coach and the work clothing and boots. The DNR get(s) the work done for the \$2,000; the youth make half of that."

Mulligan of the DNR says the experience has been a positive one for the recreation area. "It's going well. We have two crews who work two days each for six hours, helping us get work done around the park," Mulligan said. "We've had them repaint picnic tables, help with invasive species removal, trail maintenance and clearing, and helping around the offices and facility buildings, doing cleaning and maintenance." Webster said he hopes to run the program again next summer and possibly employ twice as many workers.

To learn more about the DNR Summer Work Experience and find out how to get on the list for next year, contact Webster at 616-242-6495.

Follow Karen Bota on Twitter @KarenB_ISS.

Helping Hands: MARESA puts students to work in local parks

By Jackie Stark, Journal Staff Writer (jstark@miningjournal.net), The Mining Journal

MARQUETTE - Department of Natural Resources parks in the area are getting a little sprucing up this summer, with the help of some students with disabilities, the Marquette-Alger Regional Educa-



tional Services Agency (MARESA) and Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS).

All three organizations are playing host to a new pilot program in the area, which takes students with disabilities and gives them paid work over the summer.

The students, this year ranging in age from 19 to 22, are spending their summer working with park rangers in a few area parks, including Van Riper State park.

"For many of the students it's their first paid job, so they'll know what it's like to get a paycheck and to develop some of those job skills," said Chad Rowley, MARESA's coordinator for the project. "Also, (it gives them) an opportunity to develop some references so they can hopefully get paid employment in the future as well."

Rowley said the summer employment helps the students learn soft skills they'll need while also giving them on-the-job training.

"They're developing relationships with the park rangers who do have full-time jobs and they get to work with them," Rowley said. "To develop those relationships is important. Obviously, the hard skills, whether they're painting a building or cutting or trimming the trails, or working side-by-side with someone fixing machinery, getting a chance to see things they wouldn't have seen otherwise."



Van Riper Park Supervisor Doug Barry said having the students working along-side his regular staff has been a great experience for both sides of the equation.

"It really makes me feel good that, first of all, we're able to pay the kids in helping them, but we're training them to get into the job force and make money for themselves," Barry said.

Barry said the students have already completed a lot of work in the few weeks the program has been up and running. Everything from painting and staining buildings to clearing trails to working on preventing invasive species has been done by the group of students, who work six hours a day, twice a week.

Students Pete Robertson, Craig Vaughn, Maria McGraw and Megan Wisniewski participate in summer jobs at Van Ripper State Park in the Upper Peninsula.

"The students seem to like it. I think they like the variety of tasks," Barry said. "As we get into the job force, sometimes you get a job where you're doing the same thing every day, and right now, they're doing something different every day. And, we're teaching them those job skills with all those activities."

MRS provides much of the funding for the program, along with the DNR.

MARESA also provides the students with two job coaches, who work with them over the summer to fine-tune the skills they're learning.

Jackie Stark can be reached at 906-228-2500, ext. 242.





SAVE THE DATE

2014 MTSA Annual Transition Conference
March 12-14, 2014
Bavarian Inn
Frankenmuth, Michigan 48734

ANNOUNCING

MTSA's **New** Website:

<http://www.michigantsa.com/#!/home/mainPage>

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