

MRS Transition Bulletin - Winter Issue

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

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Michigan – Transition Outcome Project (MI-TOP) and Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) Join for a Day of “Purposeful Collaboration”

Thursday, January 27, 2011 will Bring MI-TOP and MRS together to Strengthen Interagency Collaboration

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) just recently reached its 30 year anniversary mark and in that time professionals have worked hard to improve education opportunities on behalf of students with disabilities. The Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as Amended in 1998) also has directed professionals working in vocational rehabilitation to work with transition students and much progress has been made to improve workplace opportunities for students with disabilities.

In Michigan collaborative efforts have been longstanding between education and Michigan Rehabilitation Services that target transition students. For many years Michigan has been engaging in developing and implementing interagency collaboration for the benefit of transition students.

It has been awhile since MRS and education have had a chance to come together to learn, build and strengthen partnerships and network. Many new staff have joined transition efforts working with students. To keep our transition programs effective it is paramount that interagency collaboration be a continuous improvement effort. Partnerships need constant attention to remain strong so that students can benefit and be successful after high school.

MI-TOP and MRS have spent the last several months planning for a day of collaborative training that will take place on Thursday, January 27, 2011 at the Ramada Inn Hotel and Conference Center in Lansing. The workshop will be called “Purposeful Collaboration” and the objectives of the training are to:

- ⇒ Improve understanding of mission, purpose and function of education and vocational rehabilitation in serving youth with disabilities.
- ⇒ Strengthen the quality of local partnerships that result in improved high school/postsecondary outcomes for students.

Planned activities include:

- ◇ Inspirational slide show featuring transition students
- ◇ Setting the stage for our partnership - Eleanor E. White Director MDE/OSE-EIS, and Jaye Porter, MRS Bureau Director
- ◇ Assessing the elements of our partnership - What does it mean to collaborate?
- ◇ Discussing documentation and confidentiality
- ◇ Aligning student IEPs and IPES
- ◇ Supporting agency participation in IEPs
- ◇ Assessing the quality and level of local Vocational Rehab/educational partnerships
- ◇ Engaging students and families in the transition process
- ◇ Learning about the ins and outs of cash-match agreements, certified expenditure agreements, donations and innovation dollars
- ◇ Understanding financial aid – options for students who do not earn a high school diploma
- ◇ Applying elements of productive collaboration

Save January 27, 2011 so that you can participate in this event. MRS staff can register for the workshop on E-Learn.

MRS Participation in Student IEPs. When is MRS “Likely” to Provide or Pay for Services?

By Chuck Saur and Cynthia Wright

Educators across the state of Michigan often experience angst when they get to the part of a student’s Individual Educa-

tion Program (IEP) that asks whether or not an agency should be invited to the IEP. The question is asked, "Is there an agency that is likely to provide or pay for transition services for the student?" The teacher checks yes or no. If the answer is yes, the school has an obligation to invite the agency that is likely to provide or pay for services to the student's IEP meeting. And, as always, consent from parents or the student (if over 18 and their own guardian) must be received ahead of time.

It is a commonly held belief that when MRS counselors attend student IEPs, it is a best practice. However, it is very challenging for MRS counselors to attend all IEP's. It is possible that a well-intentioned teacher can quickly become discouraged when sending IEP invitations to their MRS counselor and the counselor doesn't attend the meetings. At the same time, a highly devoted MRS counselor can run themselves into the ground attempting to attend every IEP that they have been invited to.

Teachers and MRS counselors are both trying to do their jobs the best way that they can. In many instances, in spite of best efforts, both might miss a huge opportunity to get it right for the student. When considering if MRS is the right agency to invite, there are several factors to take into account.

"Teachers and MRS counselors are both trying to do their jobs the best way they can."

Is the school responsible to provide the services that are being requested of MRS?

This of course is the age old question and there are many gray areas. The fundamental question is whether or not the school has laid the groundwork for the student to be able to talk about their vocational goals and what supports they need to be successful. MRS is most effective helping a student achieve an employment outcome when they are building upon a solid foundation from the student's school experience. This includes the students being able to share information about their disability, strengths, interests, aptitudes and abilities and how these factors relate to their job goal.

Is the student ready for employment services?

Participating in MRS services requires a commitment from the student. Does the student want to work? Does the student have the time to invest in vocational rehabilitation activities? Assessing the student's readiness to participate in activities leading to employment is critical. When students are not ready or motivated to move towards employment, MRS counselors have a limited or no ability to help the student achieve employment.

Are MRS services needed during the time frame of the IEP?

MRS is often a valuable connection for students, but it is important to evaluate if the timing is right. If MRS services are needed in the near future, it may make sense to hold the invitation to the IEP until next year. This doesn't mean that MRS can't be involved in the student's transition process. Informational sessions about employment, orientations about MRS services and basic employment consultation may be provided to the student. Because of the demands on everyone's time, MRS attendance at IEPs is best reserved for relevant conversations about MRS providing direct services.

"...it may not be necessary for MRS to attend an IEP on that student."

Is there another process (apart from the IEP) that MRS and the school are using to prepare students?

Many MRS counselors and teachers meet with students to conduct vocational planning and develop student Individual Plans for Employment (IPE) outside of the IEP process. If a student has an IPE established with MRS, it may not be necessary for MRS to attend an IEP on that student. Perhaps the student could bring their IPE to the IEP meeting and share their MRS plan with the IEP team.

Tips about inviting MRS to IEPs

The least effective way to ensure MRS attendance at IEPs is dropping an invitation in the mail. This practice meets the requirements from the school perspective of inviting an agency that is likely to provide or pay for a transition service for the student. From the MRS perspective, it means that huge numbers on IEP invitations keep coming in the mail.

Ongoing communication between MRS counselors and school staff is essential to share information and discern whether or not a student needs MRS supports and determine whether or not MRS attendance is needed at a student's IEP. Some strategies that have worked to ensure MRS attendance at IEPs are:

- Planning in advance to discuss the reasons MRS participation is needed and to determine available times that work for the counselor

- Scheduling multiple IEPs in a block to maximize MRS travel time and time in the school
- Discussing MRS issues at the beginning of the meeting by starting with the post-secondary vision statement so the MRS counselor has the option of attending the entire meeting or just part of the meeting
- Using the Outlook calendar meeting request option or the Meeting Wizard available on the internet to schedule meetings when everyone is available
- Giving the MRS counselor advance notice (often MRS counselor's schedules fill up weeks in advance)
- Spreading IEPs throughout the whole year to avoid "IEP season"

When school staff and MRS counselors are frustrated with each other there is only one thing to do – communicate. Seek to understand the challenges that each other is facing. The most respectful interpretation is helpful, for example, believing that school and MRS staff are doing everything possible to help students. Remember, we are all striving towards the same thing: to help students transition seamlessly from high school into employment.

Grand Rapids Opens Second Project SEARCH Site

By Kathy Freeman, Rehabilitation Counselor Grand Rapids District Office

The Grand Rapids District office is excited about opening our second Project SEARCH site. This year we are partnering with Spectrum Health, the largest employer in Kent County, to offer 10 students with disabilities the chance to participate in three on the job learning rotations in the hospital. We are entering into our third year with 5th/3rd Bank with another 10 students.

Project SEARCH interns are those in their final year of the educational system—from ages 18 to 25, who need one more year of skill building to be ready for competitive employment. Students are at the work site for the full academic day, starting with a classroom setting learning employability and independent living skills, and then spending the bulk of the day in an actual job setting. Students have the opportunity, over the course of the academic year, to participate in 3 different job rotations. At the hospital we are anticipating job rotations in such areas as sterilizing surgical supplies, stocking supplies in patient rooms/emergency rooms, working in the family waiting rooms, food service and environmental services. The bank rotations are more clerical nature such as filing, mailroom, and collating, copying and entering information into spreadsheets.

Project SEARCH's focus is on competitive employment at the end of the training year, if not sooner. Our partnership consists of the employers, Hope Network, Grand Rapids Public Schools, and MRS. Not only has this provided an excellent opportunity for our students, it has also provided an opportunity to build working relationships with two major employers in our area.

In July, I was able to attend the Project SEARCH National Conference along with my educational partners. Project SEARCH sites are up and running in 39 states, as well as in Britain and Australia. I attended sessions on a variety of issues such as gaining ideas on how to better market our graduating students, how to build better relationships with employers, how to better assess students' capacities and how to better engage parents/families to support their students. Many of the sites have achieved 100% job placement, something that we haven't yet reached, but we now know is possible. In the coming year we will be striving towards that goal.

Michigan now has a total of four Project SEARCH sites up and running. Besides two sites in Grand Rapids, Monroe County has a site at Mercy Memorial Hospital System and Detroit has a site at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan. Recently all four sites presented at the MRS Leadership Council.



All four Project SEARCH sites presented at the MRS Leadership Council. From right to left: James Samsel, Transition Coordinator, Monroe ISD, Vicki Taylor, Hope Network – Director of Adult Services, Lori Eshenroder, Instructor, Monroe ISD, Jannette Howard, MRS Site Manager, Kathy Freeman, MRS counselor, Grand Rapids District Office, Ivy Horne, ARRA Transition Specialist, Detroit Renaissance District, Ms. Lekisha Franklin-Shorter, Transition Specialist from DPS, Cynthia Wright, MRS Consultant, Shelia Montgomery from Blue Cross Blue Shield and Ms. Dove, Project SEARCH Instructor

My Michigan's AmeriCorps Experience

By Shana Holet



Shana Holet, AmeriCorps and VISTA participant

My name is Shana Holet and I recently completed a one-year AmeriCorps term of service as the Inclusion VISTA at the Michigan Community Service Commission (MCSC). I chose to become involved in national service because I have a passion for creating community environments where all individuals are valued for who they are and differences are embraced. At the beginning of my service I had no idea I would become part of a larger movement intertwined with so many unique individuals with varying characteristics.

Serving at the MCSC as the first-ever Inclusion AmeriCorps*VISTA allowed me to help national service programs – AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve, and Senior Corps – engage and support individuals with disabilities in service. Part of my service included educating programs about how to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all individuals, as well as assisting programs with providing reasonable accommodations. My service also included outreach to the disability community to promote national service as an option for people with disabilities.

Serving as the Inclusion VISTA also provided an opportunity for me to share my own disability experience with Mental Illness, Fibromyalgia, and a Cognitive Disability to make my efforts more relatable. Such a commitment and personal identity allowed me to draw on prior knowledge of people, groups, and organizations that previously may not have been reached by national service.

Part of my service plan – and a personal goal of mine – was to develop an e-newsletter to be shared with members of Michigan's national service and disability communities alike. Titled *IN Touch*, this resource combines valuable information relevant to individuals and programs striving to incorporate individuals with disabilities into their organization, shares best practices for those already doing so, and profiles national service programs modeling these efforts. This e-newsletter will continue to be distributed bi-monthly to hundreds of individuals in the hopes of making a difference. Past editions of the *IN Touch* newsletter are available on the MCSC website at www.michigan.gov/mcsc.

The newsletter has been a catalyst for the development of additional outreach materials and resources. This includes an informational document that outlines the different effect AmeriCorps*State, National, and VISTA programs have on an individual's disability benefits, as well as an entire section of the MCSC website devoted to Disability/Inclusion efforts.

All too often individuals with disabilities are excluded or discouraged from contributing in meaningful ways; but with programs like AmeriCorps, the opportunity to serve and make a difference can become a reality! It is this type of innovative thinking that will open new doors for people with disabilities. AmeriCorps and national service can become the first step to larger service opportunities or even employment for individuals who may have never considered that they, too, can make a difference. I am hopeful my VISTA service will help create a new, more inclusive perception of national service that will result in a diverse population of members ready to "Get Things Done!"

**Shana has elected to do another year of service as an AmeriCorps VISTA with Elder Law of Michigan.*

Megan Jones Receives Champion Award

Recently graduating from the Nursing Assistant Program at MCTI, Megan Jones from the MRS Macomb District office received an MRS Champion Award on October 20, 2010. Champion Awards celebrate and honor the accomplishments of employers, partners, MRS employees and customers who have demonstrated outstanding commitment to the MRS Mission of partnering with individuals and employers to achieve quality employment outcomes and independence for persons with disabilities.

Megan's MRS counselor stated that, "Megan began receiving MRS services as a teen transition student in high school. She always participated actively and was engaged in developing skills needed to overcome her disability. After deciding to pursue the Nursing Assistant Program at MCTI, she worked hard to overcome barriers and passed her



Megan Jones poses with her MRS counselor Melissa Spahic

certification exam as a result of her diligence and determination.”

Congratulations Megan!

ODEP Releases Making the Move to Managing Your Own Personal Assistance Services (PAS): A Toolkit for Youth Transitioning to Adulthood

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor, through its Youth Technical Assistance Center, recently announced the release of [*Making the Move to Managing Your Own Personal Assistance Services \(PAS\): A Toolkit for Youth Transitioning to Adulthood*](#), a guide designed to help transition-age youth with significant disabilities as well as their family and friends navigate the complex world of PAS.

Transitioning into adulthood can be awkward for nearly every young person. For transition-age youth with disabilities, issues surrounding managing PAS can be intensified by normal developmental concerns such as striking out on your own and navigating the road into adulthood. Accessing and maintaining long-term supports, such as PAS, has often been a significant barrier to employment youth and adults with disabilities. This new guide assists youth in strengthening some of the most fundamental skills essential for successfully managing their own PAS: effective communication, time-management, working with others, and establishing professional relationships. Such skills are key to not only enhancing independence, but also thriving in the workplace and growing professionally. Topics covered include:

“...issues surrounding managing PAS can be intensified by normal developmental concerns...”

- Understanding the differences between job-related and personal PAS;
- Evaluating individual readiness to live independently and manage PAS;
- Establishing goals in transitioning to greater independence;
- Identifying individual PAS needs;
- Considering a service dog;
- Advertisizing for, interviewing, and hiring personal assistants;
- Covering the costs of PAS;
- Managing and training assistants;
- Handling awkward moments with personal assistants;
- Recognizing abusive situations; and
- Firing personal assistants.

Whether moving from school or a home setting to work, college, or living on their own, transition-age youth and their families or friends would benefit from the information and guidance offered by the toolkit. Sample worksheets, questions, and charts provide readers clear, helpful examples of things to consider along the path to greater independence. And stories from real youth and their families give practical insight and guidance for youth with disabilities who want to manage their own PAS.

For more information or to download a Word or PDF version of the toolkit, please visit the ODEP's Youth Technical Assistance Center, the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability-Youth at <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/PAS-Toolkit>.



SAVE THE DATES

MI-TOP/MRS “Purposeful Collaboration” Workshop
Ramada Inn Hotel & Conference Center
7501 West Saginaw Hwy
Lansing, MI 48917
January 27, 2011

MTSA Conference
Bavarian Inn
1 Covered Bridge Lane
Frankenmuth, MI 48734-1939
March 16, 17 and 18, 2011

MI-TOP Workshop
Ramada Inn Hotel and Conference Center
7501 W. Saginaw Hwy
Lansing, MI 48917
April 28-29, 2011

MI-TOP Workshop
Ramada Inn Hotel & Conference Center
7501 West Saginaw Hwy
Lansing, MI 48917
January 28, 2011

START – Community Partners Meeting
Clinton County RESA
1013 S. US27
St. Johns, MI 48879
March 30, 2011 – 9:00am-12:00pm

PLEASE FORWARD OR PRINT TRANSITION BULLETIN

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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