

## TRANSITION INSTITUTE

### ISSUES SUMMARY PAGE

#### EMPLOYMENT TRACK

##### I. Partnerships

*a. What's working now? Share local collaborations, including the benefits of the partnership.*

Participants felt that collaborations, in general, are working well. We are engaging a wide variety of stakeholders, including connecting with families and home supports, and assuring that different agencies' roles are well-defined. Regularly scheduled meetings help keep the lines of communication open among all partners, and have resulted in high-quality internship programs, bringing all partners to the IEP table, and enhancing partner visibility in the schools.

*b. What could we do to improve partnerships?*

We need to do more to ensure that all stakeholders are involved and engaged in the transition process, and that families are included as one of those stakeholders. We need to ensure that employers know how they can benefit from these partnerships by increasing visibility in the community and being knowledgeable about new businesses and new initiatives taking place in the community. Community activities and awareness need to be incorporated into classroom instruction. Students need self-advocacy models and instruction, which will also help them to better understand how their choices help determine their outcomes, as well as to increase their self-worth. Parents also need education in seeing the student's strengths and positive attributes, and how to empower their students to speak and advocate for themselves. Parents need to know that there are support systems that can provide help to their students in their transition to the workplace. There is a strong perception that parents have low expectations of their children with disabilities, and they need help in seeing the small successes, to counter their fears about losing the disability check, and to show them how they can help in fostering a smooth transition. Work experiences need to start earlier, and there needs to be a listing of age/grade appropriate transition activities related to work, so that students can better see themselves as productive citizens of the community. Strengthened relationships between the school system and the One-stop career centers will help with this, as well as clarifying liability and unpaid work experience issues. Businesses need a clearer understanding of what constitutes a reasonable accommodation and how to work with people with disabilities. Certain issues such as confidentiality, housing, and up-to-date diagnostic and psychiatric information need to be addressed and resolved before the students leave school.

*c. What are the take-aways from the presentation and discussion (things you may act upon after the Institute)?*

Communication among partners is key to successful transition. Meetings with school personnel need to be held regularly, and no less than once a year as personnel and school assignments often change. It may be beneficial to have separate discussions surrounding diploma-bound students, as their service needs are different from the certificate-bound students. It is critical, when having any of these discussions, to have all partners at the table, including DDA and MHA. Therefore, it is important to know who the contact people are at those various agencies on a local level. Continued funding for Summer Youth Employment programs is needed. Parents need to be involved early to help them understand the importance of self-advocacy and independence.

## II. Planning

- a. *What's working now in the area of transition and career assessment practices?*  
Making connections with the students early, and getting to know them one-on-one, is a critical component for effective assessment and transition. Some jurisdictions have a transition planning inventory or assessment profile that follows the student through school. This allows for tracking and evolution of student progress. Career Assessments that occur while the student is in school, whether completed by the school system or a community provider, is an important component. VSP has a Work Adjustment Program that is provided in the schools. There are several successful Summer Youth Employment Programs and internship experiences, such as Start on Success and federal government opportunities, that provide stipends as well as funds for lunch and transportation. Including DORS in the IEP meetings at the appropriate time is working very well.
- b. *What could we do to improve assessment practices?*  
Start with collecting data earlier, by taking an organized approach to assessment. Assessments should be categorized so that they can be used appropriately for different populations; it should not be necessary to repeat formal assessments if there is an accepted standard across disciplines for crucial assessment components. Adopting the evidence-based philosophy that all can work would help to change the mindset of all professionals working in transition. In adopting that philosophy, it is essential that flexibility in recognizing the uniqueness of adolescence is built in. There is a need for strong job developers who understand the needs of youthful workers, as well as DORS business liaisons specific to transition in each office.
- c. *What's working now in the area of career development strategies?*  
Programs such as Disability Mentoring Day, Project Search, internship programs that students can participate in during their senior year, Ken's Kids (through Home Depot), and one-on-one job coaching and social networking have all proven to be effective career development strategies.
- d. *What could we do to improve career development strategies?*  
Risk Management Teams need to get involved to assure that our students understand safety requirements on the job. Student leadership teams can help to foster student involvement. Transportation strategies, including travel training for public transportation, need to be addressed prior to students leaving school. Rural transportation continues to be a problem, and United We Ride may be able to assist with some of these

issues. Real solutions are needed for this vital issue. Liability insurance for unpaid workers and interns continues to be a concern, and consideration should be given by the school systems to provide funding for paid internships. Systems need to work together to assure that stipends for internships or paid work experiences do not adversely affect eligibility for specialized transportation access. Career assessments done by the school system are often not sufficient for adult services, so DORS should provide for career assessments while students are still in school. It is essential that students understand the consequences of their decisions, particularly in choosing certificate vs. diploma. Job coaching sometimes needs to be provided beyond 110 hours for transitioning youth and needs to be considered on a more consistent basis; also, job coaching needs to be professionalized.

e. *What's working now in the area of self-determination skill development by youth?*

No responses.

f. *What could we do to improve self-determination skill development by youth?*

Help students to set realistic goals with obtainable benchmarks on their IEP. By involving students in the IEP, they will be better able to articulate their accommodation needs; students need ample opportunities to practice articulating these needs. Parent Involvement Centers need to be bolstered and improved across all jurisdictions.

g. *What's working now in the area of accommodations and supports, including the provision and training in the use of assistive technology?*

Early assessments for AT are being done, and information is being shared between school and adult service agencies. The needed accommodations are being documented and shared with the IEP team, and Career and Tech Programs are getting involved with AT as well.

h. *What could we do to improve accommodations and supports?*

Increase awareness that AT assessments, equipment, and training can be provided prior to graduation. Students need to have more ownership of their AT needs, and be able to articulate the importance of accommodations in the post-school setting. This will also increase self-awareness and move towards greater self-advocacy.

i. *What are the take-aways from the presentation and discussion (things you may act upon after the Institute)?*

We need greater creativity and flexibility in our various systems. Portfolios need to be established that provide meaningful information to the student and that can be translated into post-school environments. Assessments need to be varied, and need to be provided earlier than they are now. Self-determination instruction and practice needs a greater focus while the student is still in school and earlier in school. Part of this should include educating students on the ADA and reasonable accommodations so that they know their rights and what is applicable to them in the college or job setting.

### III. Careers

a. *Essential work habits and skills:*

- i. *What are the essential work habits and skills of youth that have been identified by employers?*

Punctuality, hygiene, attendance, ability to problem solve, being ready for work on time, not eating breakfast on company time, self-advocacy, having the practical skills for the job tasks, and appropriate social skills are the work habits and skills expected of all workers. We also need to listen to employers, respond to their needs, understand their HR policies, work collaboratively with them to better understand their needs, and to identify skills that should be taught through career counseling.

- ii. *What's working now to help youth gain these work habits and skills?*

There are some effective strategies currently being used, such as checklists, the 'Hula Hoop' strategy for students to visualize the appropriate social distance (personal space), and getting feedback from employers either from summer work experiences, informational interviewing, or job shadowing. Students need to gain that self-awareness and need to be able to appropriately articulate their likes/dislikes and strengths/weaknesses. That awareness also includes helping students to understand why they want to work. Helping them to see their own motivation and their willingness to put in the effort to show they are reliable for employment is key. EDS and WAT programs help to provide mentoring and modeling of appropriate behaviors, as well as to increase self-esteem.

- iii. *What could we do to improve the work habits and skills of youth?*

Providing for skill building activities to prepare students for the work world is essential. This could include such things as time management training, especially for their morning routine, practice traveling to the job, planning for contingencies (e.g., traffic jams, bad weather), carrying emergency contact information, how to respect personal space, and teaching coping mechanisms for dealing with a variety of consequences to their actions. Students also need assistance with developing a greater awareness of what they would like to do and what they can do, as well as awareness of transportation options. This can be done by scheduling time for diploma-bound students to learn work-related skills, providing EDS/WAT through mobile units, and by helping students to develop proactive relationships. Some systems change that might help with this are to make WAT exempt from the DORS financial means test, having a job developer in each region to help exclusively with those who are job ready, have more flexible funding through the school systems to provide for services that are truly in the best interest of the student. There needs to be an overall understanding that no one person or agency can do everything.

- b. *Job application and interview process:*

- i. *What are the important considerations of job applicants to succeed that have been identified by employers?*

Even when just going in to fill out an application, appropriate dress and hygiene are important. Students also need to have the ability to actually complete the application, especially online and computerized versions.

ii. *What's working now to help youth gain these skills?*

Providing services when students need them, and allowing them to return when they are ready.

iii. *What could we do to improve these skills?*

We need a greater understanding of the employer's policies and how they might differ from another employer. We should be providing our youth with a 'cheat sheet' of essential information that they can refer to when completing an application, as well as for emergencies. Students also need to be trained on conversational skills; i.e., how to negotiate around 'chit-chat' during an interview.

c. *Building business partnerships:*

i. *What do employers say we need to consider when contacting employers?*

We need to understand that most employers do background checks, even for volunteers or interns. Paid experiences through community providers should be considered for those youthful workers with no work experience. We need to do our research on the employers before making cold calls to offer matches of a variety of students. It is still important to assure that we are placing the best student to meet the employer's needs.

ii. *What's working now to building partnerships with employers, including the types of opportunities available to youth as a result of these partnerships?*

We are building relationships with employers by listening to their needs. We are getting evaluative feedback from employers to better improve our services to them; this is also resulting in some rewarding networking links. Sending our students for informational interviews is proving beneficial, as well as touring a variety of job possibilities for exploration. Students are being hired by business as a result of internship placements as well. Cold calling is also working, when done correctly.

iii. *What could we do to improve these partnerships?*

The best thing we can do to improve these partnerships is to provide training to students as early as possible on completing their own job search.

d. *What are the take-aways from the presentation and discussion (things you may act upon after the Institute)?*

Students should be educated on Schedule A and Tax credits in order to offer these incentives to potential employers.

#### IV. Snapshot – Pulling it all together

a. *What's working now? Share effective practices.*

When students can learn the value of work and the incentives of working, such as social interaction and the value of money, this builds their motivation. Activities such as paid internships also serve to build that motivation and attract hard to reach youth. While youth need to earn the level of performance, their level of motivation is increased through options and choices offered through summer jobs. There are some exemplary summer

programs that focus on preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary education as well. It has been suggested that DORS expand their resources for transitioning youth on their website, including a listing of specific summer programs for postsecondary education.

*b. What could we do to improve employment outcomes of youth?*

Increase opportunities for secondary work-based experiences for students with disabilities. Increase staff development opportunities to facilitate job development, placement, and retention skills.

*c. What are the take-aways from the institute (things you may act upon after the Institute)?*

We all need to do a better job of sharing resources to all stakeholders. We need to replicate outstanding models that are currently working, and build better collaborative practices for partnerships.

**Lunch Speaker Reactions:**

Students need to be coached on appropriate dress, as well as appropriate ringtones on their cell phones. Financial limitations should not keep students from dressing appropriately, as professional clothing can be purchased at thrift stores, and agencies can provide assistance with obtaining dress clothes. It is important for service providers to understand the hiring processes for various types of employers, including a greater understanding of Schedule A procedures. Having an internal contact at a government agency is far more effective in gaining placements than going through disability personnel.

*Essential work skills – do students have opportunities to get them? If so, how are they getting them?*

Such things as youth training programs, summer employment, work adjustment training, job readiness training, work-study programs, career issues classes, and work skills modules which simulate work settings, are just a few examples of ways in which students can gain essential work skills.

*What can we do to help kids improve their work skills?*

We can provide for realistic job opportunities, career development modules, career prep courses as class electives, financial training classes for all students prior to graduation, bolstered vocational training programs, expansion of apprenticeship programs to allow students to have the opportunity to choose professional and education routes and to allow for these choices to begin as early as 9<sup>th</sup> grade, situational job sampling, central resource for job program options, and make community college options more readily available while still in high school, especially for certificate students who might be able to take advantage of GED prep and financial literacy courses.

*Job applications and interview process: what's working? What do we need to work on?*

Students need opportunities to practice completing on-line applications. They also need help to overcome the anxiety of in-person interviews, especially those with more than one interviewer. Maryland Business Roundtable is a good resource for interview preparation. We need to increase students' exposure to interview preparation materials, and start educating them on interview and work-related processes such as dress for success as early as 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Impress the importance of punctuality. Prepare for interviews by making sure students can articulate three positive and three negative things about themselves, but to not go "too negative" about themselves. Students also need to be educated on disability disclosure, particularly how to discuss their disabilities and needed accommodations with

employers. Students should also be encouraged to take alternative routes to job placements, such as seeking informational interviews.

*What businesses do outreach for youth with disabilities, similar to the Home Depot and Giant programs?*

Regardless of the program, service providers need to be sure that they deliver on promises, particularly when it comes to job supports. Relationships built on trust with employers need to be fostered. Service providers need to train staff members to act as business people rather than service providers, and add a sales dimension to their job description. Through this approach, they can build stronger networks with businesses. Cold calls may not always be appropriate. Small business employers have said that vocational rehab agencies are too slow in sending employees to them when they have positions to fill. Snagajob.com and other websites help service providers and students find jobs in their communities.

## **POST-SECONDARY TRACK**

### I. Partnerships

#### a. *What's working now? Share local collaborations, including the benefits of the partnership.*

Open communication is vital and gives students and their parents a clear understanding of expectations and roles. As students become involved and included in the college environment, they develop a greater sense of belonging; this often can begin through participation in transition fairs. Setting high expectations for students fosters a greater sense of commitment from them. Project SEARCH is one example of a national program that now has a local site which provides for students to work in community with a variety of career experience opportunities. There are programs on college campuses that require extensive collaboration with partners to offer non-credit offerings for students with disabilities (such as Single Step and other community college programs). There is a Career Starter program which is an employment skill-oriented program for students on a certificate track. DORS 'in-school funds' can be used for students while they are still in school (e.g., high school senior can enroll in community college classes while still in high school); schools are determined by student choice but limited by funding – this is available for diploma and certificate bound students. There are programs, such as Project Access, which allow for parallel enrollment in college courses while still in high school; such programs include both academic and practical aspects of the transition. The Pathways Program is a partnership program between DORS, Community College of Baltimore County Disability Support Services, and WTC for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders; graduating students from this program have moved on to four year schools. Some jurisdictions have periodic meetings between DORS, Service Coordinators, and the school system to track DDA services and to assure that these students are connecting with service providers. Access Plus is a new state grant program for students with a documented learning disability (between ages 18 and 22); it provides for financial assistance to get Assistive Technology and other updated assessments, as well as to provide for services that Disability Support Services might not be able to provide. Finally, there is the Trio Program, which provides for first generation college students with disabilities who are also economically disadvantaged.

*b. What could we do to improve partnerships?*

A one-stop bonding program is needed. Programs like MAST for students with LD and All About ACE, which help with organization skills and provide for college visits, assist with the college and Financial Aid application process need to be replicated and expanded. Getting that roadmap to postsecondary education early on is important. Too few students are involved in transition/partnership programs; we need to disseminate information/access about transition programs to local schools, parents and students (Thinkcollege.net is a good resource and database for postsecondary transition programs). There is a need for a forum to disseminate this information and market these opportunities to parents/families and students. Brainstorming is needed for increased funding to provide more students with these types of program opportunities. We need to expand use of technology and social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter to disseminate information and jump start discussions to ‘get people to the table.’ We need to share information with partners with greater openness, not hoarding resources/collaborations, and ‘leave egos at the door’. Professional respect and responsiveness, along with follow up, is critical in maintaining positive relationships and continuing productive work. This includes keeping focus on student needs/desires/goals instead of bureaucratic concerns/agendas, and partnering for creative solutions through open dialogue and problem-solving, showcasing and celebrating successes, and building professional relationships. There is a need for greater parent education and participation, on such topics as understanding the disability, differences between public education supports and college/university supports, IDEA vs. ADA, and eligibility vs. entitlement. Students likewise need training on self-advocacy skills through such avenues as summer programs that prepare them for college and student-led IEPs. Funding is needed to extend successful programs to locations that are not currently receiving them, like Pathways and Project Access. We need to improve and expand our liaison relationships with colleges and universities, have a greater presence at job fairs, and encourage our students to move into educational, teaching, and rehabilitation positions.

*c. What are the take-aways from the presentation and discussion (things you may act upon after the Institute)?*

Provide education to parents/families on self-advocacy, self-determination, understanding of disability and how to articulate this. Also, parents/families need to understand the differences between public and postsecondary education programs, especially the documentation changes for students (i.e., requirements of IDEA vs. ADA), so ongoing communication between families, students, and transitioning partners is crucial. Disability Support Services need to have a greater presence at college fairs to improve understanding of those services. Students should also be encouraged to obtain psychological/behavioral assessments during their senior year of high school, to rethink/address the postsecondary implications of their cognitive abilities. Programs that should be replicated include the Pathways Program (which is a model that could also be applied to other underserved populations such as youth with mental illness), and the CTE/Special Ed partnership in Cecil County.

II. Planning

*d. What’s working now in the area of transition and career assessment practices?*

Cross-training of transition personnel and special ed teachers is effective; the challenge is to put that knowledge into practice and make sure that all students with disabilities are receiving a variety of transition assessment options. MSDE's new Career Development Framework, which mandates school based counseling related activities for grades K-12, and will begin portfolio development in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Students will receive a hard copy; perhaps some of the selected forms could be moved online?

*e. What could we do to improve assessment practices?*

Utilize informal assessment instruments more frequently for authenticity. As assessments are completed, we need to make sure the results are communicated to students in a way that they can understand. This would also involve improved communication in order to keep all parties involved in the process. Standardize practices from successful programs to make them available statewide. This would include pre-college experiences/opportunities that have incorporated internships, such as the Young Scholars Program and Project Access. Community colleges could implement these programs, and start internships earlier. Incorporate a more holistic approach through data on relationally focused aspects of the consumer.

*f. What's working now in the area of career development strategies?*

School systems' service learning requirements give an opportunity for students to try new things. Mentoring and job shadowing programs help to link the transition students to employers; paid opportunities linked to these activities are more meaningful to the students.

*g. What could we do to improve career development strategies?*

Develop a formalized mentoring program that's sustainable. Family education that incorporates a networking component would instill a sense of community among families.

*h. What's working now in the area of self-determination skill development by youth?*

Students are being invited (by law) to IEP meetings, which has definitely increased student participation in the IEP but is still not enough. Some areas have incorporated self-determination skills training into the curriculum. When professionals, such as VR counselors, are meeting with students, they often have individual sessions with the students, which is an effective way to establish rapport before meeting with the parents. The employment goal is the focus, and services follow from that. Students as consumers are given homework/preparation for follow up appointments, and are held accountable for that homework.

*i. What could we do to improve self-determination skill development by youth?*

Provide for training so that students are better able to properly use the technology that they already have, or to be better able to utilize it to assist with every day functioning. This would include providing for an understanding of the usefulness of accommodations. Provide for drama workshops, using trained actors, to help teach self-advocacy skills. Start early in schools in discussing disabilities; students learn best from other students, especially in small groups. Work with students to design their own IEPs. Provide support systems for students with chronic mental illness, such as that provided by NAMI

through their grant. Make sure students and their parents understand about self-advocacy – parents are constantly fighting for their children and this can sometimes be manifested as aggressive behavior.

*j. What's working now in the area of accommodations and supports?*

Getting AT into the school before the student graduates, better communication between schools and VR, and giving students the opportunity to try out AT in a variety of settings have all been helpful in this area. Also, providing for tours of WTC, and developing cooperative agreements has helped as well.

*k. What could we do to improve accommodations and supports?*

Students need to learn what their accommodations are, what supports they are currently receiving for their education, and this should be taught before they exit school so that this does not need to be taught separately afterward. Students, regardless of whether they are diploma or certificate bound, need to be prepared for meetings; individual interactions between the special ed teacher and the student are key to bringing the student into the process while the teacher models components of self-determination. This will give students context and greater understanding of the process. We need to teach students how to articulate and advocate in regards to their disability and to reflect on current accommodations. **We need to figure out how to better involve and educate parents in the process**, utilizing such tools/resources as webcasts, parent-to-parent word of mouth networks, parent groups, and transition conference sessions for parents to help them understand and identify important components and resources. Some good resources for this are: Education Matters, Postsecondary Disability Support Services found on MD Department of Disabilities website, transition workshops offered by local and community agencies, and the adolescent transition lecture series given by Kennedy Krieger Institute.

*l. What are the take-aways from the presentation and discussion (things you may act upon after the Institute)?*

Call your legislators and educate them on transition issues. The transition community needs to seek out government officials; if enough people come to a meeting, the legislators will come. We need more DDA funding. Having drama workshops to teach self-advocacy skills is important and seems to work. Encourage students to be a part of the IEP process and to voice their opinions. Look towards developing student portfolios; this will give students a product that they can understand. From this, they can then formulate the questions to ask at all levels and phases of the process. Parents need to be approached as equal partners in the process; leave egos at the door and move past the adversarial nature of school-parent interactions. Consult with parent groups and networks; they are a great resource and an authentic mode for disseminating information to parents. Self-advocacy can be taught through individual interaction and educating important people in the student's life to model and facilitate self-advocacy.

### III. Careers

*m. Essential work habits and skills:*

*i. What are the essential work habits and skills of youth that have been identified by employers?*

Essential work habits and skills include being on time, establishing eye contact, researching the company, informing the company about their schedule and hand delivering the schedule (when that flexibility is acceptable to the company), enthusiasm and positive attitude, having back-up plans for such things as transportation and childcare, problem solving skills, ability to accept criticism, appropriate dress, and accepting authority of the supervisor. Some tools which can assist with developing these skills are pre-employment training such as that offered by One-stops, work first recruitment programs offered at some colleges, DBT therapy provided to assist students with problem solving training, and checklist of employability skills.

ii. *What's working now to help youth gain these work habits and skills?*  
Using the job readiness worksheet that provides information on barriers to employment, especially criminal background issues, can be helpful. Make consumers aware of the benefits they receive, and work with benefits counselors/SSA representative to help clarify benefits issues. Work Adjustment Training programs, funded by DORS and provided by agencies like VSP and Goodwill, help students to improve soft skills for the workplace; these are primarily for certificate track students or students no longer in school. Career and Tech Ed programs are providing for these skills for those students who qualify; there are also career research and development class components in Maryland schools that include resume writing, mock interviews, cover letters, etc.

iii. *What could we do to improve the work habits and skills of youth?*  
Increase supports in the employment setting. Provide for work experiences through summer jobs (paid), work-study programs, job shadow experiences, and work adjustment training. Provide for service learning hours in a locale that students have a vested interest in. Increase amount of reflection/discussion that stems from changes that individuals go through during the job search/exploration process. Assist students in getting volunteer work experience if jobs are not available to get in the door – go to the HR department to find these volunteer positions. These experiences will still help to build a resume.

n. *Job application and interview process:*

i. *What are the important considerations of job applicants to succeed that have been identified by employers?*

Legible handwriting and/or oral communication skills are important. Make sure cell phone messages and social networking profiles are appropriate for viewing by potential employers. Professionals should help students to practice the look and feel of the interview at every session with the student. Students should also dress appropriately when picking up a job application; the interview begins the minute you walk through the door of the business.

ii. *What's working now to help youth gain these skills?*

Set a standard of professionalism during sessions with the student. Help students with self-marketing – the 'total packaging' of their presentation to the employer.

Programs like Work Adjustment Training and summer jobs programs help students to develop the experience of what to expect in a job setting.

*iii. What could we do to improve these skills?*

Give students opportunities to practice these skills. Have expectations for them at school to prepare them for the work world. We need more programs like Upward Bound, and we need to modernize our processes, like providing for scanned resumes. Agencies should have the same expectations as employers, and set a good example by modeling appropriate behaviors with students. We need to paint a realistic picture of what is feasible, balancing optimism and encouragement while not inflating unreasonable expectations in the face of the frustration of the employment process – in other words, facilitate perspective (keep mental health diagnoses in mind when doing this); Include actual business partners in mock interviews so students can get realistic feedback from a real employer in the field. This feedback might hold more validity in the eyes of the interviewee, even though it is in a more informal environment.

*o. Building business partnerships:*

*i. What do employers say we need to consider when contacting employers?*

Employers want people with skills; they do not want to be approached by job developers as a ‘favor’. Keep the business’ bottom line in mind. Come to businesses/employers with references that have been successful. Students need to be familiar with transportation and develop independence skills. Short-term OJT, as well as tax credits, are good incentives for employers and should be kept in mind and incorporated into the conversation with employers.

*ii. What’s working now to building partnerships with employers, including the types of opportunities available to youth as a result of these partnerships?*

Activities such as Disability Mentoring Day (e.g., the event with Pax River AFB); use of internships, volunteer experiences, youth recruitment programs; employee recognition luncheons to show appreciation are all effective in building partnerships. Also, we need to encourage and reach out for press coverage for successful partnerships. Have a representative serving on the local Chamber of Commerce, and make sure they are included on the board, if possible.

*iii. What could we do to improve these partnerships?*

Do your homework; match the needs of the business to the needs and resources of the students. Recognize employers when they have made a significant contribution, through such things as county or state awards/certificates. Keep the lines of communication open, particularly when difficulties arise but also during successes. Reach out to businesses at the best time for them; try to get a sense of market forces in the community and target them appropriately. Make other partners in the community aware of business needs, and let other agencies know about our clients (this varies by county). Encourage youth programs that foster a sense of disability awareness. Remind youth about the availability of expungement and Federal bonding programs to foster a sense of security in those instances in which they have a criminal background.

- p. *What are the take-aways from the presentation and discussion (things you may act upon after the Institute)?*

Tie the service learning hours requirement to the career exploration process for work-based experiences. Educate employers about people with disabilities and the importance of postsecondary/work-based experiences for transitioning youth. Look into SSI benefit information and the availability of benefits counseling; Expect more from consumers/students when they come into sessions. Find creative ways to recognize employers.

#### IV. Snapshot – Pulling it all together

- q. *What's working now? Share effective practices.*

Some programs/practices that are working now include the CTE/Special Ed partnership in Cecil County, using the portfolio as an ongoing assessment of the student's skills and abilities, active DORS involvement, Transition Fairs, DORS In-school funding, and work experience programs.\

- r. *What could we do to improve employment outcomes of youth?*

AT assessment and training early on would help. We need more transition counselors to provide for services for youth. We need more parent education, development of realistic goals, reliable transportation, employer education services, funding for essential skills training, and expansion of the community based waivers through DDA (currently capped). We need to make sure there is recognition and focusing on what students are looking for. Helping them to do the homework, participate in advanced preparation, and formulation of plans and back-up plans is critical. Students also need an understanding of their disability and be able to articulate what accommodations are necessary for them to succeed.

- s. *What are the take-aways from the institute (things you may act upon after the Institute)?*

All players (including, DORS, DDA, MHA, NAMI, parents) need to communicate openly and delineate what role they play in order to ensure collaboration. The process needs to begin early. Spotlight best practices, and encourage duplication of programs that have proven successful. Resources need to be readily available for all partners at a centralized location in order to provide easier access. We need to make efforts to ensure that the chronic mental health population is properly served. The career checklist tool is a useful tool. Have an employer panel for parents to have parents hear what employers are looking for.

#### **CLOSING PLENARY SESSION**

- a. *What's working now? Share local collaborations, including the benefits of the partnership.*

There are exemplary summer programs that focus on preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary education. It has been suggested that DORS expand resources for transitioning youth on their website, to include a listing of specific summer programs for transitioning youth.

- b. *What could we do to improve partnerships?*  
Increase opportunities for work-based experiences for students with disabilities. Increase staff development opportunities to facilitate job development, placement, and retention.
- c. *What are the take-aways from the presentation and discussion (things you may act upon after the Institute)?*  
We need to do a better job of sharing resources with all stakeholders (parents, students, agencies, etc.) . We need to replicate outstanding models that are currently working. We need to build better collaborative practices for partnerships to benefit transitioning youth.

*RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY*

*Adele Connolly, in conjunction with the George Washington University TACE Center*