



**TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH WITH EMOTIONAL
AND BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES:
MOVING TOWARD SELF SUFFICIENCY**

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For additional information:
California Mental Health Planning Council
1600 9th Street
Sacramento, CA 95818
(916) 445-1198

Obtaining meaningful and stable employment is an important part of transitioning to adulthood. Typical pathways include graduating from high school, completing postsecondary education and training, and obtaining work experience that leads to progressively higher paying positions. Transition-age youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities (hereafter referred to as transition-age youth) who are receiving special education services, are in an out of home placement through the juvenile justice or foster care system, or are homeless do not appear to be successfully navigating these pathways.

The National Longitudinal Transition Survey – 2 (NLTS-2) indicates that a large percentage of transition-age youth are not completing high school, enrolling in postsecondary institutions, or obtaining meaningful employment. Approximately 56% of students who received special education services due to an emotional disturbance completed high school compared to 70% of all youth with disabilities. Approximately 21% of youth with an emotional disturbance who had been out of school for up to two years were enrolled in some postsecondary institution compared to 30.6% of all youth with disabilities. Approximately 36% of youth with an emotional disturbance who had been out of school for up to two years were employed compared to 43% of all youth with disabilities (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, and Levine, 2005).

The NLTS-2 also indicates that the rates at which transition-age youth with disabilities complete high school and gain employment differ by ethnicity and income as well. Transition-age youth with disabilities who are from families with low-income are less likely to complete high school than transition-age youth from families with high income. Transition-age youth with disabilities who are Hispanic have a lower rate of high school completion than youth who are White and African American. Transition-age youth who are African American are less likely than transition-age youth who are White to be employed up to two years after leaving high school (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, and Levine, 2005).

Research also indicates that youth transitioning from out of home placements, whether through the juvenile justice or foster care system are not completing high school, enrolling in postsecondary education institutions, or obtaining meaningful employment. The Network on Transitions to Adulthood reports that 12% of formerly incarcerated youth had a high school diploma or GED by young adulthood and approximately 30% were in either school or a job one year after their release. Furthermore, youth who have been adjudicated delinquent are seven times more likely to have a history of unemployment and welfare dependence as an adult (Network on Transitions to Adulthood, 2005). Studies indicate that 4 years after leaving foster care 46% of young people do not have a high school diploma, 62% have not maintained employment for one year, and 13% have graduated from a four year college (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2002).

Data from the Social Security Administration also indicate that transition-age youth are not successfully navigating pathways to meaningful and stable employment. In December 2007, there were 1,245,295 aged, blind and disabled individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) in California (SSA, 2007). The largest percentage of individuals who are receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Disability Insurance (DI) benefits have a psychological disability. Furthermore, those who are receiving SSI or DI benefits due to a psychological disability are more likely to begin receiving benefits while young and continue to receive benefits for the rest of their lives (Baron and Salzer, 2002). Many transition-age youth who receive SSI or DI benefits do not appear to ever obtain meaningful and stable employment.

The California Mental Health Planning Council is interested in ensuring that transition-age youth successfully navigate a pathway to meaningful and stable employment and do not become dependent upon SSI or DI for their entire lives. The first section of this document discusses the factors that may contribute to poor postsecondary employment and education outcomes for transition-age youth. Section two describes the core elements that should be part of any program serving transition-age youth. The third section describes some promising approaches to addressing the factors contributing to poor postsecondary employment and education outcomes for transition-age youth. Section four describes the programs and resources available to address the factors contributing to poor postsecondary employment and education outcomes for transition-age youth. The fifth section describes some recommendations to improve transition services for transition-age youth in California.

I. Contributing Factors

A number of factors appear to contribute to the low number of transition-age youth who enroll in postsecondary education and training programs, obtain postsecondary employment, and leave the SSI or DI program. Transition-age youth are not acquiring the academic, vocational, social, and self-determination skills they need to successfully obtain postsecondary education and training and/or employment (Lane and Carter, 2006). After leaving high school, most transition-age youth do not receive adequate services designed to help them acquire the skills they need to successfully pursue postsecondary education and training and/or obtain competitive employment (Davis and Hunt, 2005). Those transition-age youth who receive SSI or DI benefits may choose not to pursue employment because they are afraid of losing health benefits (GAO, 1996).

The National Longitudinal Transition Survey – 2 revealed that the academic performance of students with disabilities, including those with emotional and behavioral disabilities, was below that of the general population (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, and Levine, 2006). Furthermore, students who have emotional behavioral disabilities are more likely to receive poor grades (Wagner and Cameto, 2004) and drop out of high school (Wagner, Newman, Cameto,

Garza, and Levine, 2005). Low academic achievement and high school graduation may limit access to postsecondary education and training opportunities, and restrict later employment and career opportunities (Lane and Carter, 2006).

Research suggests that transition-age youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities do not perform well those skills judged to be most critical to job success by employers (Carter and Wehby, 2003). Carter and Wehby (2003) found that employers tend to rate the job performance of adolescents who have emotional and behavioral disabilities lower than those adolescents rate themselves. Employers also tend to rate the importance of various work behaviors differently than those adolescents rate those work behaviors. Data from the National Longitudinal Transition Survey – 2 also indicate that students who have emotional and behavioral disabilities are less likely to take occupationally specific vocational education than students in the general population (Wagner and Cameto, 2004).

Research suggests that enhanced self-determination skills may improve student outcomes, including employment status and participation in postsecondary education and training (Carter, Lane, Pierson and Glaeser, 2006). Data from the National Longitudinal Transition Survey – 2 indicate that most students between the ages of 16 and 18 who have an emotional disturbance possess low to medium self-determination skills related to autonomy in career planning. Fifteen percent of students scored in the low range and 58% of students scored in the medium range as it relates to autonomy in career planning (SRI International, 2005).

Enhanced social skills may improve postsecondary outcomes for transition-age youth. Difficulties with interpersonal relationships are common for children and youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities (Chen, 2006). Social skills are important to successfully obtaining and maintaining employment. Research suggests that transition-age youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities do not possess the job-related social skills necessary to obtain and maintain employment (Nishioka and Bullis, 2002).

Research indicates that transition from adolescence to stable adulthood typically lasts until age thirty, a period of time that Arnett (2000) has labeled emerging adulthood. During this time of emerging adulthood, young adults are developing the capacity to function as adults. Most adolescents who have emotional and behavioral disabilities continue to have those disabilities during emerging adulthood and require supports and services to continue navigating their transition to stable adulthood. However, transition-age youth typically age out of child-serving systems between the ages of 18 and 22 and do not access services as young adults even when they want them (Davis and Hunt, 2005). The lack of transition services during the period of emerging adulthood may contribute to poor transition outcomes.

Finally, transition-age youth who currently receive or are considering applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Disability Insurance (DI) benefits may choose not to seek employment. Individuals who receive SSI or DI benefits are automatically eligible for Medicaid benefits. Many individuals who have serious mental illness rely upon Medicaid to pay for mental health treatment, including talk therapy and medication. The General Accounting Office found that some individuals are reluctant to seek work because they do not want to lose their health benefits (GAO, 1996).

Others may also encourage transition-age youth to enroll in the SSI program and remain on SSI. County mental health departments rely upon Federal Financial Participation through the Medicaid program to fund the mental health services they provide, which provides an incentive for county mental health staff to counsel transition-age youth to enroll in the SSI program. The cash benefits that SSI provides also helps pay for housing that transition-age youth may need. For some families, the cash benefits a transition-age youth may receive through SSI is a large percentage of the families' income. In those cases, family members may be reluctant to encourage the transition-age youth to seek work because they do not want to lose the cash benefits. These factors may also contribute to transition-age youth remaining on SSI for long periods of time.

II. Core Elements of a Transition Program

The California Mental Health Planning Council recommends that a transition program include a number of core process elements. A transition facilitator¹ is probably the most important part of a transition program (Bullis and Cheney, 1999; Bridgeo, Davis, and Florida, 2000; Lehman, Clark, Bullis, Rinkin, and Castellanos, 2002; Bullis and Fredericks, 2002; and Clark, 2004). Transition facilitators build relationships to engage transition-age youth and their families in the program, conduct assessments, organize transition teams, facilitate transition planning processes, and coordinate services.

Transition facilitators outreach to and engage transition-age youth and their families in the transition program by developing relationships with them. In their review of two successful transition programs (Job Designs and Project RENEW), Bullis and Cheney (1999) concluded that the relationships transition facilitators developed with the transition-age youth were a critical component of both programs' success. These relationships helped to maintain the transition-age youth's interest and motivation to be involved in the program and allowed for the

¹ Different transition programs use different titles for the role of a transition facilitator, such as transition specialist and service coordinator. Some programs may employ transition facilitators who are generalists, and other programs may employ transition facilitators who are specialists, such as employment specialists.

development of interventions that were individualized to the transition-age youth's unique needs and goals.²

Assessments provide information that help transition-age youth and those working with them establish transition goals and objectives, identify the supports and services they will need to achieve those goals and objectives, and monitor progress over time. Clark (2004) recommends that a transition facilitator conduct a strengths and needs assessment using a strengths-discovery process when a transition-age youth first enrolls in the transition program.³ The strengths-discovery process helps the transition facilitator learn about the transition age youth's strengths, interests and aspirations while keeping the youth's needs in perspective. This assessment information may be used to inform the development of goals and objectives in the transition plan. Clark (2004) also recommends using functional in situation assessments to measure a transition-age youth's level of skill in a particular life domain, such as employment (Gamache, Knab, and Clark, 2007).

A number of researchers recommend using a person-centered planning process to involve transition-age youth in the planning and decision-making process (Hagner, Cheney, and Malloy, 1999; Bullis and Cheney, 1999; and Clark, 2004). A person-centered planning process involves transition-age youth in identifying short-term and long-term postsecondary goals and objectives. Clark (2004) recommends using Making Action Plans because of its simplicity.⁴ Project RENEW uses Personal Futures Planning, which is based upon Making Action Plans (Hagner, Cheney, and Malloy, 1996).⁵

A transition team assists transition-age youth with developing and implementing the transition plan. Clark (2004) recommends using a core team and a virtual team. The core team includes the transition-age youth, the transition facilitator, and one or two other people who are important to the youth, such as a parent or friend. The core team completes the person-centered planning process. The virtual team includes those service providers and community members who will

² Bridgeo, Davis, and Florida (2000) discuss strategies for developing relationships with transition-age youth and their families.

³ Blase, Wagner, and Clark (2007) describe how to conduct a strengths-and-needs assessment using a strengths discovery process.

⁴ Clark (2004) lists a number of person-centered planning processes that might be used with transition-age youth, including Group Action Planning, Personal Futures Planning, Dare to Dream, *The Real Game Series*, Framework for Accomplishment/Personal Profile, and Essential Lifestyles Planning.

⁵ The California Career Resource Network (<http://www.californiacareers.info/>) may be helpful in transition planning. The mission of the California Career Resource Network (CalCRN) is to provide all persons in California with career development information and resources to enable them to reach their career goals. Its primary duty is to distribute career information, resources, and training materials to middle school and high school counselors, educators, and administrators in order to ensure that middle schools and high schools have the necessary information available to provide a pupil with guidance and instruction on education and job requirements necessary for career development.

be needed to provide formal and informal supports and services. The transition-age youth and transition facilitator meet with members of the virtual team to negotiate access to those services.

Service coordination is another core process element of a transition program. Transition-age youth often need supports and services from multiple agencies and/or community-based organizations over time to achieve their transition goals. Transition facilitators also assist transition-age youth with accessing and using formal and informal supports and services (Clark, 2004).⁶

As described in Section I above, access to supportive services during the period of emerging adulthood is likely one of the factors contributing to poor postsecondary outcomes for transition-age youth. Transition-age youth who have had the opportunity to participate in a transition program, will likely need some assistance after leaving high school and/or aging out of other child serving systems. Some transition-age youth will not participate in a transition program while in high school or other child serving systems, but could benefit from one as a young adult. A growing number of young adults are developing emotional and behavioral disabilities after graduating from high school and in postsecondary education and would benefit from a transition program. Therefore, a transition program should transcend the traditional child and adult service delivery systems.

Finally, the role of a transition facilitator is time intensive and a low caseload is essential to program success. In the two programs that Bullis and Cheney (1999) reviewed, transition facilitators maintained a caseload of 12 to 15 and a portion of those transition-age youth were not actively engaged. Bridgeo, Davis, and Florida (2000) reviewed an effective program in which transition facilitators maintained a caseload of 6 or 8. To implement the Transition to Independence Process (TIP) system, Clark (2004) recommends that transition facilitators maintain a caseload of no more than 15 with an equal number of youth who need active coaching, maintenance coaching, and follow-along support.

III. Promising Interventions

The previous section described process elements important to a successful transition program. It did not describe the types of supports and services likely to help transition-age youth acquire the knowledge and skills they will need to achieve the postsecondary education and training goals and objectives contained in their transition plan. This section describes promising approaches to helping transition-age youth to complete high school and acquire academic, vocational, social, and self-determination skills.

⁶ Clark (2004) recommends that transition facilitators help transition-age youth develop self-determination skills. While assisting transition-age youth to access and use supports and services, transition facilitators need to focus on allowing transition-age youth to practice self-determination skills.

Academic Interventions

Acquiring academic skills and completing a high school diploma are critical to being able to obtain meaningful and stable employment. While evidence indicates that youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities are not acquiring academic skills and completing high school, very little is known about how to instruct high school students who have emotional and behavioral disabilities (Lane and Carter, 2006). Carter and Lunsford (2005) suggest that integrating academic and career technical instruction may be an effective method of improving the academic performance of high school students who have emotional and behavioral disabilities.

The Check and Connect Model is an intervention that may increase high school persistence and graduation among transition-age youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities. The Check and Connect model was originally developed to prevent dropout and promote student engagement among urban middle school students with disabilities. The model has been effective with students in elementary, middle and high schools who have and do not have disabilities (Sinclair, Christenson, and Thurlow, 2005). Sinclair, Christenson, and Thurlow (2005) tested the model with students receiving special education services due to an emotional disturbance in an urban school district. Students participating in the Check and Connect program were less likely to drop out of school, attended school with greater consistency, and were more likely to have completed high school or be enrolled in an educational program at the end of 4 years.⁷

Vocational Rehabilitation Interventions

Nishioka (2002) describes a model for assisting transition-age youth with becoming competitively employed. The model includes a five-phase process that helps transition-age youth learn a job and prepare to become competitively employed. The model also includes planned behavioral interventions, social skills training, and support groups.

The five-phase process includes learning, responsibility, transition, independence, and employability.

- 1. Learning Phase:** The transition facilitator transports the transition-age youth to and from work, works side by side with the transition-age youth, and is available to manage all behavioral consequences at the worksite. The transition facilitator uses his or her time with the transition-age youth to mentor him/her. A total task analysis approach is used to teach the transition-age youth the job to be performed. The transition-age youth works from three to five hours per week.

⁷ Please see Sinclair, Christenson, and Thurlow (2005) for more information about the Check and Connect program, research design, and program impact.

2. **Responsibility Phase:** The transition facilitator remains at the worksite, but does not work side by side with the student at all times, and continues to manage behavioral consequences. The transition-age youth may travel independently to and from work and may work five hours per week.
3. **Transition Phase:** The transition facilitator does not remain at the worksite, but does check in with the transition-age youth and employer on a random basis. The transition-age youth travels independently to and from work and works ten to fifteen hours per week. The employer and the transition facilitator cooperatively manage behavioral consequences.
4. **Independence Phase:** The transition facilitator checks in with the employer by phone approximately once a week. The employer assumes major responsibility in making decisions about behavioral consequences, but continues to consult with the transition facilitator. The transition-age youth continues to travel independently to and from work and may work from fifteen to twenty hours per week.
5. **Employability Phase:** The transition-age youth applies for competitive employment and maintains the work placement for at least 6 months. The transition specialist offers minimal support to the student, primarily in the area of completing tax forms, compiling a resume, or filling out insurance papers.

This model is also supported with job-related social-skills training, which is provided in a classroom setting as well as on the worksite. Nishioka and Bullis (2002) recommend incorporating a problem solving approach and using role playing and group discussion when teaching social skills in a classroom setting. The transition facilitator is responsible for reinforcing those job-related social skills at the worksite (Nishioka and Bullis, 2002).

Transition-age youth may also learn job-related social skills in a vocational support group. The vocational support group consists of 10-15 students who meet two to three times each week for 50 to 60 minutes to talk about work-related issues. The goal of the group is to provide support to students in the vocational program, to teach students to apply problem-solving skills to the work setting, to teach students to use peers as a natural but extended support system for work situations, and to teach students to give one another honest praise and helpful advice regarding work problems. The vocational support group is intended for the students to address their issues and concerns and is not just another class (Nishioka, 2002). Project RENEW also uses a vocational support group. The Project RENEW support group includes 6 – 8 transition age youth and meets once a week for 60 minutes (Hagner, Cheney, and Malloy, 1999).

As indicated, this model includes interventions designed to modify inappropriate behavior. Some transition-age youth may be at risk for exhibiting behavior that places them or others at risk for harm. Understanding the potential for such behavior prior to a job placement is important. The context of a job placement may reduce the risk for harmful behavior by preventing them or minimizing the opportunity for the transition-age youth to engage in such behavior. Providing

transition-age youth with a positive on-the-job training experience may also reduce the likelihood of inappropriate behavior. However, emergency procedures should be in place for the transition facilitator to respond in the event that a transition-age youth exhibits behavior that places her/him or others at risk (Nishioka, 2002).

Self-Determination Skills

Research suggests that enhancing self-determination skills may improve secondary and postsecondary outcomes. Little is known about interventions that help transition-age youth acquire self-determination skills. Increasing opportunities for transition-age youth to practice self-determination skills may help them acquire those skills (Carter, Lane Pierson, and Glaeser, 2006).

It is important to provide transition-age youth opportunities to practice self-determination throughout the transition process. Transition-age youth may practice self-determination in the transition process through a person-centered planning process. Clark (2004) uses the term transition facilitator to emphasize that the role is to facilitate the youth's transition rather than direct it. Transition facilitators mentor transition-age youth to help them develop self-determination skills and allow transition-age youth the opportunity to practice self-determination.

Benefits Planning

Research suggests that transition-age youth who receive SSI or DI may not seek employment because they do not want to lose income and health benefits. However, the Social Security Administration offers a number of work incentive programs that allow individuals to receive SSI or DI to retain income and health benefits. Many people likely do not take advantage of these incentives because they are complex to understand and determine whether or not one will be better off seeking employment. A benefits planner may help transition-age youth who are receiving SSI or DI plan for employment while maintaining benefits.⁸

Some transition-age youth may cycle in and out of employment with changes in such things as their wellness or the economy. When a transition-age youth who has left the SSI or DI program to work loses employment, she/he may need to reenroll to access cash and other benefits. A benefits planner may help those youth to efficiently navigate the reenrollment process as well.

IV. Existing Programs and Resources

A number of state and local programs and services are available to help transition age youth complete high school and acquire academic, vocational,

⁸ Disability Benefits 101 (www.disabilitybenefits101.org) is another resource individuals may use to understand the work incentives available to them.

social and self-determination skills. This section describes many of those programs and services.

Completing High School and Postsecondary Education

Transition-age youth may pursue a number of pathways to completing a high school diploma and pursuing postsecondary education. Various supports and services are also available to assist transition-age youth along each pathway. While completing high school is the most common pathway to a high school diploma, a student who has left high school may pursue a high school diploma in an adult school or community college. A student who has left high school may enroll in an adult school to receive additional education. Adult schools are authorized to offer programs of study in nine particular areas identified in Education Code Section 41976(a). Among those courses of study include ones that lead to a high school diploma or its equivalent and short-term career technical education in areas with a high likelihood for employment. Students who have left high school without a general diploma may enroll in an adult school to complete a diploma or its equivalent. Students who have left high school may also enroll in an adult school to obtain short-term career technical education to prepare for employment in a field that currently needs employees. The short-term career vocational education offered varies from adult school to adult school.

Students who are 21 years of age or younger, enrolled in a high school or adult school, and meet appropriate eligibility criteria may receive special education and related services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). One of the primary purposes of the IDEA and its implementing regulations is to ensure that all eligible children receive a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living (CDE, 2007). Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Special education services may include vocational education to the extent it is specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability (34CFR300.39). Related services means transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education. Related services may include psychological services and rehabilitation counseling (34CFR300.34).

Students who are eligible for special education services through the IDEA must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IEP includes, among other items, a statement describing the special education and related services that will be provided to a student to help him or her to, among other things, be involved in and make progress in the general curriculum and to participate in extra curricular and other non-academic activities (34CFR300.320). Before a student's sixteenth birthday, his or her IEP must also include a transition plan. The transition plan should identify postsecondary goals and services needed to assist the student

with achieving those goals. Students who have an emotional disturbance should be able to access specially designed services to complete a high school diploma and to plan and prepare for postsecondary education and employment through California's special education program.

After a student leaves high school, he or she may enroll in a community college to pursue a high school diploma, short-term career technical training, a career certificate, and/or associates degree. Community colleges offer credit courses and non-credit courses. Non-credit courses offered by community colleges are similar to courses offered in adult schools. A student who has left high school may enroll in a community college to complete a high school diploma or its equivalent or to obtain short-term career technical education to prepare for employment in a field that currently needs employees. The short-term career technical education offered varies among community colleges. A student who has completed a high school diploma may also enroll in a community college to complete a career certificate, associate's degree, and/or prepare to transfer to a four-year college or university. Certificates and degrees offered also vary among community colleges.

Community colleges offer students with disabilities, including psychological disabilities, a variety of supports and services through a number of programs, such as Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSP&S) and Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOPS). Each community college may receive funding from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to provide Disabled Students Programs and Services. A student who has a disability, including a psychological disability, may request support services, and/or special class instruction through Disabled Students Programs and Services. Eligible students work with DSP&S staff to develop a Student Educational Contract, which specifies the support services and/or special class instruction the student will receive to meet his or her specific educational needs.

Transition age youth who have an emotional disturbance and are enrolled in a community college may also be eligible to receive services through the Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOPS) program. Eligible students are residents of California, are enrolled full time, have completed less than 70 units of degree applicable credit, are eligible for a Board of Governors Grant fee waiver, and are educationally disadvantaged. Students who are eligible for the EOPS program meet with a counselor to develop an Education Plan and Mutual Responsibility Contract. An Education Plan is a multi-term roadmap of courses the student and counselor both agree are necessary for the student to achieve his or her educational goals. A Mutual Responsibility Contract is intended to demonstrate the intended level of involvement and commitment of the student and the EOPS program toward the achievement of the student's educational goals. The contract should specify the services the student will receive and the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both parties.

Transition age youth who have met certain academic requirements may enroll in a campus of the California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) Systems. Some students may go directly from a high school to a CSU or UC campus and other students may go from a high school to a community college and then transfer to a CSU or UC campus. Some transition age youth do not develop a serious mental illness until they have already completed high school and enrolled in a four-year university, such as a CSU or UC campus. CSU campuses offer students the opportunity to pursue a bachelor's degree, master's degree, and some campuses offer a Doctorate in educational leadership. UC campuses offer students the opportunity to pursue a Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate degree.

Students who have an emotional disturbance or serious mental illness and are enrolled in a California State University Campus or University of California campus may request reasonable accommodations for their disability. The reasonable accommodations may vary between the university systems.

Vocational Skills

Transition-age youth may access supports and services to acquire vocational skills from a number of different programs, including regional occupational centers and programs, adult schools, workability programs, transition partnership programs, and an apprentice program.

There are seventy-four (74) Regional Occupational Centers and Programs (ROCP) in California that serve high school students 16 years of age and older as well as adult students. Between 2002 and 2005, the number of high school students enrolled in an ROCP program increased from 366,132 to 375,462 and the number of adults enrolled in an ROCP program decreased from 216,932 to 143,559. The majority of students enrolled in ROCP courses are high school students and that percentage has continued to increase.

Regional Occupational Centers and Programs offer students a number of services to help them gain the skills and competencies to successfully enter the workforce, pursue advanced education in postsecondary institutions, or upgrade existing skills and knowledge. Students may enroll in career technical education courses within one of fifteen different career clusters, such as business, agriculture, computer technology, construction, manufacturing, and automotive and other transportation technologies. The career technical education courses offered in a particular ROCP depends upon an assessment of the local labor market. Students may complement the knowledge gained in the classroom with real-life experience in business internships and/or state of the art labs (Mitchell, 2006).

Adult schools are authorized to offer programs of study in nine particular areas identified in Education Code Section 41976(a). Among those courses of study

include ones that offer short-term career technical education to prepare for employment in a field that currently needs employees. The short-term career technical education varies from adult school to adult school.

The California Department of Rehabilitation offers a number of programs and services individually and in partnership with other public agencies. The California Department of Rehabilitation provides employment services to eligible transition age youth who have an emotional disturbance or serious mental illness. Rehabilitation counselors work with eligible individuals to develop Individual Plans for Employment, which identify the supports and services the individual will need and what the individual will need to do to achieve their employment goals. The services might include training, assistive technology, work experience, and job development and placement.

The California Department of Rehabilitation partners with the California Department of Mental Health to administer the Mental Health Cooperative Program. The program serves county mental health consumers who have a serious mental illness. Consumers are referred to the Department of Rehabilitation by participating county mental health departments for vocational rehabilitation services. Employment services are provided by community-based agencies specializing in employment programs for individuals who have a serious mental illness. County mental health departments provide long-term follow-along services after the vocational rehabilitation services stop. In 2005, there were twenty-six programs statewide.

The California Department of Rehabilitation also partners with various educational systems to offer vocational services to eligible youth and adults through workability programs. The Workability I program is implemented in high schools, Workability II is implemented in Regional Occupational Centers and Programs and Adult Schools, Workability III is implemented on Community College campuses, and Workability IV is implemented on California State University and University of California campuses. Transition-age youth may access vocational services through one of these workability programs.

Workability I is a grant program administered by the California Department of Education in partnership with the Employment Development Department and the Department of Rehabilitation. In 2005, there were approximately 300 Workability I programs sites statewide, located in all 58 counties (California Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 2005).

Middle and high school students who have an active IEP are eligible to receive services through the Workability I program. A local Workability I program might provide the following types of services (Education Code, Section 56471(d)):

1. Recruitment
2. Assessment
3. Counseling

4. Pre-employment skills training
5. Vocational training
6. Student wages for try-out employment
7. Placement in unsubsidized employment
8. Other assistance with transition to a quality adult life

The Workability I program is often connected with a Transition Partnership Program. The Transition Partnership Program is administered by the California Department of Rehabilitation through local education agencies. The goal of the Transition Partnership Program is to assist students to transition from high school to meaningful employment and/or postsecondary education. High school students who are clients of the Department of Rehabilitation are eligible to participate in the Transition Partnership Program. There were 84 programs statewide in 2005.

The Department of Rehabilitation administers the Workability II program through local adult schools and regional occupational centers and programs (ROCP). Students who are eligible for Department of Rehabilitation services and enrolled in an adult school or ROCP may receive services through the Workability II program. Students may receive job placement and training assistance through Workability II.

A number of community colleges operate a Workability III program which is a contractual agreement between the college and the Department of Rehabilitation. The California Department of Rehabilitation refers clients to the community college, who may or may not be a student. The goal of Workability III programs is to assist adults who have a disability with obtaining and maintaining employment. Individual community colleges operate programs that are individualized to their student population, but most programs include services related to job preparation, job seeking skills training, job coaching, job shadowing, job contacts, job development and placement, post-employment follow-up, career counseling, student/client tracking, internship development, and vocational assessments.

Students who are enrolled in a CSU or UC campus and meet Department of Rehabilitation eligibility criteria may access vocational rehabilitation services through Workability IV.

Transition-age youth may also gain specific vocational training through an apprenticeship program. The California Department of Industrial Relations administers the Apprenticeship Program. Apprenticeship is a process in which individuals learn a skilled trade or craft from a skilled worker and take classes to learn the theoretical aspects of the skilled trade or craft. Apprentices work during the day and take classes from a high school, adult school, ROCP, or community college. An apprenticeship can last anywhere from one year to six years.

Other Employment Programs

Transition-age youth may access a number of programs that are intended to help them obtain employment. These community-based programs and services include Employment Development Department (EDD) Job Service Offices, One Stop Career Centers, vocational rehabilitation programs, and Department of Rehabilitation/Mental Health Cooperative programs.

The Employment Development Department offers job seekers a number of different services through its Job Services locations throughout the State. These job services for transition age youth who have an emotional disturbance or serious mental illness include the Intensive Services Program, job search workshops, Jobs for All, Road to Self Sufficiency Workshops, and the Youth Employment Opportunity Program.

The Intensive Services Program is available in certain job service locations across the State. The program offers participants one-on-one job search services to job seekers who need intensive coordinated employment services. The program serves a number of eligible participants, including individuals with a disability, foster youth, and ex-offenders. Transition-age youth might access these employment services to assist them to obtain employment.

The Youth Employment Opportunity Program is available in some service locations. The program provides special services to eligible youth ages 15-21 to assist them in achieving their educational and vocational goals. Youth who are thinking of dropping out of school (high school, continuation school, college, or vocational training) or have already dropped out of school are eligible to enroll in this program. Youth may receive employment services and/or assistance removing barriers to enable youth to remain in or return to school.

EDD service locations also offer job search workshops and road to self-sufficiency workshops that might benefit transition age youth. The job search workshop includes practical exercises in such topics as marketing skills through an application and resume, locating and developing job openings, effective interviewing techniques, and tips for retaining jobs. These job search workshops are open to anyone. The Road to Self-Sufficiency workshops are available in some job service locations and are designed for individuals receiving public assistance to develop the lifetime job search techniques necessary to seek, obtain, and retain suitable employment. These workshops may be located through local public assistance offices.

Most EDD service locations are within a One Stop Career Center. One Stop Career Centers offer core services, intensive services, training services and youth services. All adults, 18 years of age and older, are eligible to receive core services, which include job search and placement assistance (including counseling), labor market information, initial assessment of skills and needs,

information about available services, and follow up services to assist individuals to retain employment. The capacity to serve transition-age youth who have serious emotional and behavioral disabilities varies among the One Stop Career Centers.

Some One Stop Career Centers employ staff called Disability Program Navigators. Disability Program Navigators are available to assist individuals who have a disability, including a serious mental illness, to navigate the various programs and services available to help them obtain and retain employment. The capacity of Disability Program Navigators to serve transition-age youth who have serious emotional and behavioral disabilities varies among the One Stop Career Centers.

Self-Determination Skills

There are a number of resources available throughout California to assist transition-age youth who have serious emotional and behavioral disabilities with developing self-determination skills. Among those resources are the California Youth Leadership Forum, Youth in Mind, and the Transition-Age Youth Empowerment Project.

The Friends of Californians with Disabilities operates the Youth Leadership Forum, which is designed for youth who have disabilities, including emotional and behavioral disabilities and demonstrate leadership qualities. The forum bring young people who have disabilities together to learn from each other and successful adults with disabilities who are recognized leaders and role models.⁹

Youth-in Mind is another resource available to transition-age youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities that may help develop self-determination skills. Youth in mind is a statewide organization made up of young people affected by the mental health system seeking to promote positive change through leadership and advocacy within the field of mental health. Youth in Mind members participate in all levels of system change including member leadership summits, mental health conferences, and local advocacy opportunities.¹⁰

The Transition-Age Youth Empowerment Project operated by Mental Health America – California is another example of a project that is run by youth, which offers transition-age youth the opportunity to strengthen self-determination skills. The mission of the Transition-Age Youth Empowerment Project is to empower and inspire transition-age youth to create positive change in the mental health system. Transition-age youth are able to become involved in a project to set project goals, to plan to achieve those goals, and to participate in implementing

⁹ To learn more about Friends of Californians with Disabilities and the Youth Leadership Forum, please visit the Friends of Californians with Disabilities' website, <http://disabilityemployment.org/index.htm>.

¹⁰ Click on the following link to learn more about Youth in Mind, <http://youthinmind.weebly.com/>.

those plans. All of this translates into the development of skills that will help transition-age youth with identifying personal goals, developing plans to achieve those goals, and implementing this plans.

Other Transition Supports and Services

Transition age youth who have a serious emotional disturbance or serious mental illness often need additional supports and services while moving from high school to meaningful employment. These supports and services may include health and mental health care, income supports, and housing assistance. Sometimes, employment impacts an individual's eligibility to receive some of these supports and services.

Transition age youth who have an emotional disturbance or serious mental illness may be eligible to receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI). SSI provides eligible individuals a cash benefit, which may be useful to individuals who are preparing for employment or just beginning employment.

Individuals who are enrolled in SSI are also eligible to receive health and mental health care through the Medi-Cal program. Mental health care is important to the employment success of many individuals who have an emotional disturbance or serious mental illness.

When an individual who is receiving SSI begins to work, there is often concern about their eligibility to continue receiving Medi-Cal health and mental health care benefits. The California Medi-Cal Working Disabled Program provides health and mental health care to individuals who are working if their income is less than 250% of the poverty level. This is intended to ensure that individuals who are receiving SSI benefits continue to receive health and mental health care as they begin to work.

Finally, some individuals who have an emotional disturbance or serious mental illness need supported housing as they transition into meaningful employment and unsupported housing. Supported housing makes mental health services available to individuals that help individuals to live independently. The Housing and Urban Development Department distributes funding for the development of supported housing for individuals with disabilities, including individuals who have a serious mental illness. Some communities in California have used those funds to develop supported housing, which benefits individuals who have a serious mental illness. The Mental Health Services Act has made funds available to county mental health departments to begin to develop supported housing in their communities as well. This supported housing will exclusively benefit individuals who have an emotional disturbance or serious mental illness.

Transition age youth who are in California's Foster Care System may receive Independent Living Skills training. ILP programs are intended to help youth in

foster care develop skills that are necessary to successfully live independently, such as budgeting, shopping, and cleaning. These services may be helpful.

V. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Expand the capacity of public service systems to provide the level of services described in Section II

Transition-age youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities require an intense level of support and assistance through the transition process. The recommended case load is very low and the transition facilitator should follow the youth from adolescence into adulthood. These youth receive services in one or more systems as adolescents, including mental health, juvenile justice, foster care, and special education.

Most systems that serve adolescents do not have the capacity to provide the level of transition support and assistance described in Section II or to follow an individual from adolescence through emerging adulthood. Through the Mental Health Services Act, county mental health departments may develop a full service partnership program to provide the level of service described in Section II. A transition-age youth may also remain in a full service partnership through emerging adulthood, if necessary. Other systems that serve transition-age youth need the resources to develop those types of programs to assist with their transition to adulthood.

Recommendation 2 – Increase utilization of promising interventions described in Section III and existing resources described in Section IV

This paper has documented an array of components necessary for an effective program to serve transition-age youth, including academic interventions, vocational interventions, self-determination skills development, and benefits planning. These components should be implemented in current programs serving transition-age youth and in any new programs to be developed.

In addition, Section IV describes a large number of existing programs and resources that all existing programs serving transition-age youth may utilize. Any new programs should plan to fully utilize these available resources as well.

Recommendation 3 – Expand existing resources described in Section IV to better assist transition-age youth

The existing programs described in section IV do not have the resources to adequately serve all transition-age youth who need assistance. In particular, more professionals are needed to build partnerships with businesses that will employ transition-age youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities as those transition-age youth develop vocational skills.

Recommendation 4 – The California Legislature should create a statewide program to better assist transition-age youth who have disabilities, including emotional and behavioral disabilities, with the transition from high school to postsecondary education and/or work

California has implemented a number of grant funded pilot projects, such as Bridges to Self-Sufficiency, to better assist youth who have disabilities with the transition from high school to post-secondary education and/or work. Unfortunately, these innovative programs tend to end when the grant funding ends. California needs to identify funding to develop programs with components similar to those described in Section II that offer interventions similar to those described in Section III.

Recommendation 5 – Reduce county mental health departments' reliance on Federal Financial Participation

Federal Financial Participation from the Medicaid program is a significant source of revenue for California's community-based public mental health system. Professionals assisting transition-age youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities may encourage those youth to enroll in SSI or remain on SSI for the Medicaid benefits because that is the most cost-effective way to pay for needed mental health care. If FFP did not represent such a significant source of revenue, county mental health staff may not encourage transition-age youth to enroll in or remain on SSI.

Recommendation 6 – Work with the Social Security Administration to develop a project within the Supplemental Security Income for transition-age youth

Many transition-age youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities who are receiving SSI benefits are able to work and want to work but may not choose to work for fear of losing health benefits. Research indicates that these youth remain on SSI for a significant period of time. A special program for transition-age youth who have disabilities, including those with emotional and behavioral disabilities, could be developed that offers temporary cash and health benefits with little other restrictions to encourage youth to work. Transition-age youth need bridge money for basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter, to navigate a path to employment.

Recommendation 7 – Local Education Agencies should consistently involve benefit planners in the development and implementation of transition plans contained in students' Individualized Education Programs

Many students receiving special education services are also receiving supplemental security income or may apply for supplemental security income

upon leaving high school. The complexity of the Supplemental Security Income is a factor that may contribute to a transition-age youth's decision to seek work. A benefits planner should be an active participant in assisting transition-age youth with making decisions about how to use the Supplemental Security Income benefit most effectively while also pursuing employment.

Recommendation 8 – Expand availability of career technical education and training in California's K-12 education system

The acquisition of vocational skills is a factor likely contributing to an individual's ability to become gainfully employed after high school. Furthermore, the integration of academic and career technical education may be an effective approach to assisting transition-age youth who have emotional and behavioral disabilities with acquiring the academic skills necessary to become gainfully employed after high school. Unfortunately, California schools appear to be emphasizing academic instruction over career technical instruction. To better prepare transition-age youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities, California should make career technical education more available for those students and better integrate it with academic instruction.

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