



A Quarterly Newsletter Produced by the Rural Institute Transition Projects

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Rural Institute Transition Projects Support the Development of Employment Programs for Youth with Disabilities in Bitterroot Valley Schools by Ellen Condon and Kim Brown

Volunteering as a Work Experience Activity

In Hamilton Middle School, students with disabilities are giving back to their community by volunteering. A work experience program, the Youth Corps Program (YCP), has been developed in Hamilton Middle School for students ages 12-15. Currently there are seven students who actively participate, and 14 students from the middle school have participated since the program began in the spring of 2005. Rural Institute staff took the lead on creating and organizing the program, which included contacting non-profit agencies throughout Hamilton to identify and arrange sites where the students could volunteer their time and have some work experiences. The Commod Thrift Store, Bitterroot Humane Society, The Bitterroot Public Library, and the Bitterroot Community Garden are the current sites. Rural Institute staff wrote volunteer position and site descriptions for each site, drafted permission slips for students to participate, facilitated the identification of student learning goals to be addressed during each

experience, wrote out roles and responsibilities for the support staff at the sites, and created data collection systems and summary documents to ensure that information learned about each student was captured and incorporated into their educational planning.

The overall success of the program, however, is due to the strong support from the school administration, especially the principal at Hamilton Middle School, Barb Solomon. Barb has created the infrastructure within the school to make this program part of the special education curriculum. She ensures that teachers' and paraprofessionals' schedules are coordinated to free them up to provide coverage to the sites. She has delegated the responsibility of the program oversight to one of the middle school teachers, helps identify students who might benefit from the program, provides the school vehicle to transport students to the sites that are beyond walking distance, and handles whatever other administrative finagling might be

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Resources:

University of Montana's Rural Institute Transition Projects Home page:

<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/>

Youth Corps Project page:
<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/YCP.asp>

Parents, Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK)
<http://www.pluk.org/>

Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities
<http://www.mtccd.org/>

Essential Tools:
http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/flsa/NCSET_EssentialTools_FLSA.pdf

VR Transition Contacts:
<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/vrs/transitionslist.pdf>

Authors' Contact Information:

Ellen Condon
condon@ruralinstitute.umt.edu
Kim Brown
brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu

The Rural Institute
009 CHC, 634 Eddy
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812

(406) 243-5467
(800) 732-0323 Toll Free
(406) 243-4730 Fax

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required to get the students out the door of the school on Thursdays. Two special education teachers (Emily Doyle and Cassie Ellis), a paraprofessional (Louise Chambers), a mental health case manager (Kelly Tibbs) and physical therapist (Carla Albert) from the Bitterroot Valley Education Cooperative; and the Project Director from the Rural Institute (Ellen Condon) provide the support and coverage for students. No additional staff were required to make the project run; the existing resources were just utilized differently.

To make the schedule easiest for the school to implement, students participate in YCP on Thursdays for 7th and 8th periods. The students work for approximately one hour at their sites, after allowing for transportation time. Students typically participate at one site for a nine-week quarter and then rotate to a different site. One student is showing so much progress and is able to learn such a variety of duties at the Public Library that he has continued at that volunteer site all year and also has participated in an additional experience each quarter. The students receive class credit for their time volunteering.

We learn so much about students' capabilities, interests, and support needs while we are out in the community. At the library, for example, we can assess students' filing abilities,

organizational skills, and ability to sequence by numbers, date, and alphabet. We also can assess how well they follow routines, work independently, and follow the work protocol established by the volunteer coordinator, as well as their comfort in asking for assistance when needed and socializing with other staff and volunteers. Each week the students are required to document the time and dates that they volunteered on their time logs and write in their journals about what they did that day, what they liked and didn't like about new tasks, and anything else they think is important. (How each student participates in this activity is individualized based on their capabilities and support needs.)

Building Capacity Across Additional Schools

The support of Rural Institute Transition staff is funded by a time-limited grant. The Youth Corps Project will span three years and is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service. The grant was awarded to CTAT/Denver Options in October of 2005 and Montana is one of six states (including Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota) that are working with CTAT/Denver Options to implement this project. Each state's project design is unique, but the overall purpose is to

expose students with disabilities to volunteer opportunities and work experiences which will result in increased

employment outcomes for them in adulthood. In Montana, the Youth Corps Project provides services to approximately 23 students with disabilities currently and has served 32 students since it began.

The goal of Youth Corps is to create a sustainable program that will continue after the end of the grant,

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Definition of Formal Volunteering

Formal volunteering is an activity which always takes place in not-for-profit organizations or projects and is undertaken

- ☐ To be of benefit to the community and the volunteer
- ☐ Of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion
- ☐ For no financial payment
- ☐ In designated volunteer positions only

Source: South Eastern Volunteer Resource Service — http://home.vicnet.net.au/~sevr/volunteer_definition.htm

Training Library

Handouts, PowerPoints, and video streams from previous trainings can be found at the PLUK Video/Training Archive: <http://www.pluk.org/ITVarchive>

Past topics include:

- Discovery and Transition Planning
- Creating Transition Portfolios
- Transition Planning for Middle Students with Disabilities, and
- Partnerships for Transition
- Montana's Developmental Disabilities Program
- Post-Secondary Education Planning for Students with Disabilities

Also, audiotapes and handouts from previous teleconferences and videotapes and handouts from previous METNET broadcasts are available for check-out by contacting the Parents, Let's Unite for Kids library at 1-800-222-7585 or via email at:

plukinfo@pluk.org

A list of the teleconferences and METNET broadcasts is available on the Transition Projects Website:

http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/PLUK_materials.asp



Principles of Volunteering

- ▣ Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer
- ▣ Volunteering is always a matter of choice
- ▣ Volunteering is an activity that is unpaid and not undertaken for the receipt of salary, pension, government allowance or honorarium
- ▣ Volunteering is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community
- ▣ Volunteering is an activity performed in the not-for-profit sector only
- ▣ Volunteering is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs
- ▣ Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work
- ▣ Volunteers do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers
- ▣ Volunteering respects the rights, dignity and culture of others
- ▣ Volunteering promotes human rights and equality

Source: South Eastern Volunteer Resource Service - <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~sevrs/volunteer/principles.htm>

Rural Institute Transition Projects Support...., cont.

and to create a replicable structure for other schools to implement in their communities. Florence Schools is currently creating a work experience program with the support of Ed Boniecki of the Bitterroot Valley Education Cooperative and Ellen Condon, Transition Projects Director at the Rural Institute. Instead of volunteer sites, unpaid work experiences are being created. Much of the structure is similar to the program at the middle school in Hamilton, with the exception of the need to meet Department of Labor regulations in the area of unpaid work experience. Part of the Rural Institute staff's role is assisting the school to create documentation that will enable them to comply with these regulations.

Youth Corps in the High Schools

In addition to the support provided to Hamilton and Florence Schools, the Youth Corps Project also funds Susanne Meikle of MontanaWorks, the Rural Institute's Employment Agency, to do outreach to students and school staff in Victor, Corvallis and Hamilton High Schools. Typically students would not be able to access employment services from an adult vendor such as MontanaWorks this early in the transition process, or until they had funding from Developmental Disabilities or Vocational Rehabilitation to purchase these services. But, with the funding from Youth Corps, school staff and an adult agency can work collaboratively, blending resources to support preparation for students to be employed after graduation.

MontanaWorks currently serves 14 students through Youth Corps. Susanne has supported four students to enroll in continuing education as a

post-school outcome. One student earned his Commercial Drivers License (CDL), another is applying to college and the third pursued cosmetology school. The fourth student is studying driver's education through the Literacy Volunteers of America Program, a non-profit basic literacy agency in the local community. Six students are now employed in the community in banks, landscaping companies, a bakery, construction, and a restaurant. Three students are participating in individualized community-based work experiences at a small engine repair shop, landscaping business, and construction company. One student is a volunteer at the local animal shelter, and the final student participates in a school-based experience.

MontanaWorks has been proactive in assisting youth and families to link with other adult agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Developmental Disabilities, Social Security, Workforce Investment and Summit Independent Living to access funding and additional supports. Susanne, high school staff and local agencies recently held a Transition Forum at the Hamilton High School to link students and their families with all available resources in the valley. At the forum the agencies shared information with middle and high school students and their families. Additional forums are being planned for Corvallis, Darby, Florence, Stevensville and Victor schools.

MontanaWorks will spin off from The Rural Institute as a private provider on July 1, 2007. Susanne Meikle will become the owner and director.

Products and Forms to Support Program Development in Your School

(Click on the items below to go to the product/form available on the Rural Institutes Transition Projects Website)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Site Support Staff Roles | <input type="checkbox"/> Work/Volunteer Experience Summary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exploratory Lead Teacher Duties | <input type="checkbox"/> Work/Volunteer Experience Summary Example |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer/Unpaid Work Experience Parent Permission Form | <input type="checkbox"/> Unpaid Work-Based Learning Training Agreement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Position Description Example | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Work-Related Training Plan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Volunteer Placement Training Plan | <input type="checkbox"/> Work Experience Volunteer Log |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Volunteer Placement Training Plan Example | <input type="checkbox"/> Year-End Summary of Work/Volunteer Experiences |

Requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act Related to Work-Based Learning

Because Work-Based Learning (WBL) activities take place in employment settings, these activities must comply with the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The FLSA is the federal legislation establishing minimum wage, overtime pay, record-keeping requirements (i.e., personal employee information, wages, hours), and child labor. Employees are entitled to a regular wage of at least \$5.15 (current minimum wage) per hour and overtime pay of at least one and one-half times their regular wage for all hours more than 40 in a work week. In states with a minimum wage rate higher than the federal, the higher rate applies.

In order to promote WBL programs to prepare youth with disabilities for productive, paid employment, the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education entered into an agreement in September 1992 and adopted the following Statement of Principle:

The U.S. Departments of Labor and Education are committed to the continued development and implementation of individual education programs, in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), that will facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to employment within their communities. This transition must take place under conditions that will not jeopardize the protections afforded by the Fair Labor Standards Act to program participants, employees, employers, or programs providing rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities.

The FLSA and WBL Career Exploration, Career Assessment, and Work-Related Training Components

The Departments of Labor and Education joined this statement of principle with Policy Guidelines governing the participation of youth with disabilities in employment settings for career exploration, career assessment, and work-related training. Youth with disabilities who engage in non-paid career exploration, career assessment, and work-related training activities are not considered employees of the businesses in which they receive these services only if they can demonstrate compliance with all of the guidelines below. When schools and employers engaging in these WBL activities with youth with disabilities adhere to all of the following guidelines, they do not violate the provisions of the FLSA. The guidelines are:

- ⦿ Participants will be youth with physical and/or mental disabilities for whom competitive employment at or above the minimum wage level is not immediately obtainable and who, because of their disability, will need intensive ongoing support to perform in a work setting.
- ⦿ Participation will be for career exploration, career assessment, or work-related training at a worksite placement under the general supervision of public school personnel.
- ⦿ Worksite placements will be clearly defined components of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) developed and designed for the benefit of each student. The statement of needed

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Requirements of the Fair Labor Standards ...,cont.

transition services established for the exploration, assessment, training, or cooperative work experience components will be included in the student's IEP.

- ⊙ Information contained in a student's IEP will not have to be made available; however, documentation as to the student's enrollment in the work-based learning program will be made available to the Departments of Labor and Education. The student and his or her parent(s) or guardian(s) must be fully informed of the IEP and the career exploration, career assessment, or work-related training components and have indicated voluntary participation with the understanding that participation in these components does not entitle the student-participant to wages or other compensation for duties performed at the worksite placement.
- ⊙ The activities of the student at the worksite do not result in an immediate advantage to the business. The Department of Labor looks at the following factors to determine if this guideline is being met:
 - There has been no displacement of employees, vacant positions have not been filled, employees have not been relieved of assigned duties, and the students are not performing services that, although not ordinarily performed by employees, clearly are of benefit to the business.
 - The students are under continued and direct supervision by either representatives of the school or by employees of the business. The student receives ongoing instruction and close supervision at the worksite during the entire experience, resulting in any tasks the student performs being offset by the burden to the employer of providing ongoing training and supervision.
 - Such placements are made according to the requirements of the student's IEP and not to meet the labor needs of the business.
 - The periods of time spent by the students at any one site or in any clearly distinguishable job classification are specifically limited by the IEP.
- ⊙ While the existence of an employment relationship will not be determined exclusively on the basis of number of hours, as a general rule, each component will not exceed the following limitation during any one school year:
 - Career exploration – 5 hours per job experienced
 - Career assessment – 90 hours per job experienced
 - Work-Related training – 120 hours per job experienced
- ⊙ Students are not automatically entitled to employment at the business at the conclusion of their IEP. However, once a student has become an employee, the student cannot be considered a trainee at that particular worksite placement unless in a clearly different occupation.

Schools and participating businesses are responsible for ensuring that all seven of these guidelines are met. If any of these guidelines are not met, an employment relationship exists, and participating businesses can be held responsible for full compliance with the FLSA.

This article was extracted from: *Handbook for Implementing a Comprehensive Work-Based Learning Program According to the Fair Labor Standards Act, Third Edition, Revised, updated, and edited by: David R. Johnson, Carrie Sword, and Barbara Habegger, February 2005. The entire handbook can be accessed at <http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/flsa/default.asp>*



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The Rural Institute:
Center for Excellence in Disability
Education, Research, and Service
634 Eddy, University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
Telephone: (406) 243-4134
Fax: (406) 243-4730
TT: (406) 243-4200

<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition>