

## Developmental Disabilities Services Division – Transition Age Youth Program

### Program Overview

The Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) and community partners have collaborated for ten years to help transition age youth enter the work force and experience successful transitions. Supported education and supported job training services are located statewide to support youth age 18 to 28 with developmental disabilities (DD) in their transitions from school to work or higher levels of education. Services include specialized career training, customized job placement, independent living skills training, experiential internships, and post-secondary education (PSE). Collaborative partnerships between DDSD, provider agencies, and a host of community partners support two options in youth transition services. One option is a business based training project provided by the Project SEARCH program. The other option is a post-secondary career-oriented college program located at Vermont colleges and provided by three post-secondary support programs. The goal of all programs is successful employment in viable careers at graduation or soon after.

Project SEARCH provides technical training for students in their last year of high school through three internships located in host businesses: Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, Rutland Regional Medical Center and The Edge Fitness Center. Host businesses oversee skill development and provide direct feedback to students as they rotate through their internships. The engagement of these host companies has resulted in employment for most of the students who graduate from the program. Project SEARCH is sponsored by DAIL, Agency of Education, local school districts, three host businesses, and three provider agencies—Howard Center, Lincoln Street Incorporated and Rutland Mental Health Services.

Three post-secondary education programs – Think College Vermont at the University of Vermont, SUCCEED at Howard Center and College Steps – improve employment outcomes through course work and internships geared

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toward specific careers. This model promotes campus inclusion with older students serving as peer mentors to students with DD. Facilitating course selections based on vocational interests and independent living skill training has significantly increased self-sufficiency and employment outcomes among these young graduates. Students graduate with a 2-year *Certificate of Higher Learning* conferred by their colleges in their areas of vocational concentration.

The PSE support programs share a similar approach to integrate youth into post-secondary coursework and extracurricular activities at their collaborating colleges. SUCCEED is the only residential program, providing a continuum of skill development to help graduates move into their own apartments. PSE programs rely on close working relationships with Johnson State College, Lyndon State College, Castleton University, University of Vermont, and Southern Vermont College, all dedicated to assuring that the students with DD are authentically included in campus life.

### Staff and Partners

Designated staff from DDS, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), and the Agency of Education (AOE) make up a State team to support the work of the PSE programs. This team meets with programs to improve, sustain, and expand services for transition age youth. DDS, DVR, AOE, Vermont Family Network, PSE programs, and DD service providers meet quarterly as a group known as the PSE Consortium to share resources and to serve as a unified service delivery system that educates the general public about options for youth.

### Recent Developments and Accomplishments

A new strategy implemented this year, to develop final internships before program completion, successfully resulted in job offers. After observing a student's capabilities in a hosted internship, The Vermont Agency of Transportation, offered the Castleton University graduate a job with the highway crew. The Rutland Regional Medical Center and Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center each hired two of their own Project SEARCH graduates after

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observing their skills in internship placements. Graduates also secured employment at other companies including Phoenix Books, The Edge Play Space, Upper Valley Produce, Marshalls, Lowes, Petco, and Stowe Mountain Resort.

### Future Directions

The PSE Consortium continues to work together to inform high school students, educators and families about the benefits of enrolling in a DDS PSE program. The primary focus for the next few years will be to stabilize and sustain the existing programs through student recruitment and process improvements. Expansion through an additional Project SEARCH site is also under consideration.

### Results

DDS assesses quality through performance measures and site monitoring of each PSE and Project SEARCH program at the start and end of each school year. In addition, the National Project SEARCH organization collects annual data on employment outcomes and provides input after performing an onsite audit every three-years at each location. The audits help to assure adherence or fidelity to the Project SEARCH model. The first audit in 2016 recognized many strengths including the exceptional involvement of the host businesses and the skills of the training staff in training complex tasks.

### 2017 Performance Measures:

- 86% statewide employment rate of the 37 PSE program graduates.
- 32 college graduates became employed within 4 months of graduation.
- The wage range of employed graduates was from \$10.00 to \$14.00, with an average wage of \$10.45.

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