

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND
REHABILITATIVE SERVICES
REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM
RSA-IM-92-13
RSM-2035
DATE: April 23, 1992

ADDRESSEES: STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (GENERAL)
STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (BLIND)
CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
RSA DISCRETIONARY GRANTEES
REGIONAL REHABILITATION CONTINUING EDUCATION
PROGRAMS
RSA SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

SUBJECT : EXEMPLARY SCHOOL TO WORK PROGRAM TO INCREASE
COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR
INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

The Rehabilitation Services Administration established an Operational Plan for FY 1992 that included an objective for increasing competitive employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. One of the activities under this objective was to identify programs, projects and practices that exemplify successful school to work transition approaches to increasing competitive employment opportunities.

Several months ago, RSA invited the Directors of State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and RSA-funded grantees to nominate projects and practices they considered to be exemplary in terms of transition school to work initiatives with potential for replication. Thirteen nominations were received. These nominated programs and projects were reviewed by a work group consisting of RSA staff and outside consultants. The programs and projects were evaluated and ranked based upon established criteria such as:

--- Program philosophy, including emphasis on competitive placements in the community, consumer involvement, and individualized services;

--- Accomplishment of goals and objectives, including population served, placement statistics, and success rate;

--- Innovative approach, including employer services and/or supports, employer involvement, and linkages with public and private agencies and resources; and

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--- Potential for replication, including an interest on the part of program or project staff to serve in a technical assistance capacity to other programs.

The following program was identified as exhibiting an outstanding approach to transitioning individuals from school to work based upon the above criteria:

EXEMPLARY PROGRAM AND PROJECT - FY 1992
"Assist Secondary Students in Special Transition"
(Project ASSIST)
Naugatuck Board of Education, Naugatuck, Connecticut

Attached is a brief description of this program. Please feel free to contact the identified representatives for further information. The individuals identified in the attachment have indicated an interest in serving as technical advisors and consultants to any program interested in replicating the approaches described.

I hope that the sharing of this information will encourage other programs and projects to implement innovative approaches to increase competitive employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Commissioner
Rehabilitation Services
Administration

Attachments

EXEMPLARY SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION PROGRAM
TO INCREASE COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES
FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

FY 1992

Rehabilitation Services Administration
March, 1992

"Assist Secondary Students in
Special Transition" (Project ASSIST)
Naugatuck Board of Education

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OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM:

Project ASSIST is a model school-to-work transition program that provides students with disabilities the opportunity to make informed career choices and acquire the skills necessary to enter competitive employment. Since the 1970's, the program has evolved from its original concept of providing "hands on" job training for individuals with mild mental retardation to a comprehensive vocational training and job placement program. The program serves approximately 65 students annually who have disabilities such as moderate mental retardation, learning disabilities and psychiatric disabilities. Project ASSIST provides individually tailored vocational training and placement services that focus on helping students to prepare for, find and keep jobs in competitive employment.

Programmatically, children 11-13 years of age are taught socialization skills. In later development, students are given the opportunity to mature through diversified experiences in school, community and the world of work. At age 15, all individuals in the program receive a face-to-face orientation from a State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency counselor describing services available. During this same period, an adult daily living skills component focuses on maturity development of individuals served. Working age students are generally referred to and, if they meet eligibility requirements, are sponsored by the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency for job training, placement and on-the-job follow up services. Through this process, the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency counselor, in collaboration with Project ASSIST staff and the individual seeking services, develop an Individualized Written Rehabilitation Program to ensure quality services are identified and delivered. Once employed, Project ASSIST ensures that program staff remain involved with students, employers and parents for a minimum of a year or, if appropriate, longer. Project ASSIST has maintained a 90-95% job retention rate over the past four years.

Innovative Approaches:

Project ASSIST provides follow-up support for workers, parents and employers through evaluations, monitoring and selective interventions. Project ASSIST "markets" the skills of program participants through letters of reference and involvement with the local Job Service and

the Chamber of Commerce. Program staff also obtain job leads through family networks, the Small Manufacturers Association and agencies interested in job placement. Through interagency collaboration, diversity and creativity in job placement has occurred.

Replication:

Project ASSIST has potential for replication. Staff are prepared to provide technical assistance to other programs interested in developing a similar model.

For further validation of this program's success, please contact:

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