

Analysis of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Transition-age Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Arizona

Presentation to the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council
January 19, 2024

Agenda

- ❖ Why was this report written?
- ❖ How was the study conducted?
- ❖ What is Arizona doing well?
- ❖ How can Arizona improve?

Why was the report written?

- ❖ People with disabilities are less likely to work and more likely to be poor than people without disabilities
- ❖ Youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who get quality employment services are more likely to work as adults
- ❖ Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC) members and partners wanted to know how to make the transition to employment better for youth with IDD

What do we mean when we say transition?

- ❖ Transition is the time in a person's life when they move from school and home life to more independent adult life, it includes planning for and pursuing post-secondary education and employment
- ❖ For youth with disabilities including IDD this represents the period from age 14 to age 26.

Project Description

- ❖ Review and analysis of Arizona's Vocational Rehabilitation Program's services and supports for transition-aged youth with IDD
- ❖ Mixed methods approach including:
 - ❖ Secondary data analysis
 - ❖ Policy and practice document review
 - ❖ Data collection from stakeholders

Barriers to employment

- ❖ Lack of collaboration between key players, *i.e.* state vocational rehabilitation, education, and developmental disabilities agencies
- ❖ Family factors
- ❖ Education system factors
- ❖ Social characteristics

Who is responsible for transition services in Arizona

- ❖ The VR program, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), and Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services (ESS)
- ❖ Key finding: The Department of Economic Security (DES) is the umbrella agency for the state's VR program and DDD.
 - The VR program, formally known as Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), operates under the Division of Employment and Rehabilitation Services (DERS).
 - The state VR program does not have the final authority to institute changes due to its placement under DES.
 - In Arizona, divisions have increased the ability to provide direction over activities that affect their programs, which partners reported reduce VR's level of autonomy, input, and potential impact.

Outline for findings

- ❖ The transition process can occur for more than 10 years
- ❖ Findings are broken down by three periods and overarching issues across the transition process
- ❖ Three transition periods:
 - ❖ Awareness building for employment and community living
 - ❖ Career exploration, goal formation, formal career planning, job development, and postsecondary education planning
 - ❖ School exit to employment and/or postsecondary education

Awareness building for employment and community living

What is Arizona doing well?

- ❖ Consistent senior leadership within the VR program
- ❖ VR's Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) include high quality practices
- ❖ Youth with IDD are encouraged to participate in Pre-ETS
- ❖ Youth can access Pre-ETS multiple times beginning at age 14 through the age of 22 or school exit
- ❖ Youth in VR funded and local school district administered Transition School to Work(TSW) programs automatically receive Pre-ETS

Awareness building for employment and community living

What can be improved?

- ❖ Earlier connection to Pre-ETS
- ❖ Pre-ETS request process
- ❖ Limited number of Pre-ETS providers
- ❖ Intended outcomes of Pre-ETS services delivered by providers are not measured

Career exploration, goal formation, formal career planning,
job development, and postsecondary education planning

What is Arizona doing well?

❖ **VR contracted TSW programs**

- TSW programs facilitate strong connection to VR transition coordinators, local VR counselors, and resources for schools to establish best practices in the provision of transition services, including resources to hire staff.
- Local TSW programs can use project funds to pay youth for their work while enrolled in TSW. Earned wages represent the minimum wage or higher.
- TSW curriculum represents a wide range of evidence based and best practices in transition, person centered planning, career exploration and job development
- TSW allows for flexibility in service delivery to meet the individual's needs and the community's resources

Career exploration, goal formation, formal career planning, job development, and postsecondary education planning

What can be improved?

- ❖ Awareness of TSW program locations and outcomes
- ❖ Access to TSW: There are 236 public-school districts and only 24 TSW programs
- ❖ Earlier connection to VR employment services
- ❖ Knowledge of supported employment

School exit to employment and/or postsecondary education

What is Arizona doing well?

- ❖ VR has a senior level staff member whose primary responsibility is to support state and local level collaboration between VR and DDD
- ❖ VR and DDD have established quarterly meetings to focus on identifying barriers to employment outcomes for people who are clients of both VR and DDD
- ❖ State education policy and practice guidelines require a post-school goal for each youth with a disability to be in place prior to graduation

School exit to employment and/or postsecondary education

What can be improved?

- ❖ Interagency transition planning
- ❖ Interagency activity to develop and implement individual integrated employment goals
- ❖ Youth and family knowledge about how to be actively involved in collaborating with different agencies

Overarching issues

- ❖ Limited awareness about the purpose of VR's engagement in transition
- ❖ VR staff turnover and the impact on VR capacity
- ❖ Need for capacity-building for VR vendors
- ❖ Need for capacity-building for VR counselors
- ❖ Awareness of DB101
- ❖ Awareness on how to engage with youth with intersectional social characteristics
- ❖ Low expectations for people with IDD

Recommendations

- ❖ In total there were more than 40 recommendations
- ❖ Appendix E of the report provides an implementation guide for the next 18 months for the VR program including collaborative actions for VR and the Department of Education, the Division of Developmental Disabilities, and Arizona Employment First

5 Key Recommendations

- ❖ Build a better VR consumer
- ❖ Scale up VR funded TSW programs to ensure access to all youth in Arizona's public-school districts
- ❖ Enhance training on supported employment including customized and self-employment
- ❖ Improve VR's web presence
- ❖ Collaborate to lower the age of transition in Arizona from 16 to 14

How can the ADDPC help?

- ❖ Continue engagement with Arizona Employment First
- ❖ Consider funding additional research projects that look at the role of education and developmental disabilities services agencies into the transition from school to work
- ❖ Consider working with other DD Network partners to education partners about why Arizona should lower the age for transition to 14*

*Suk, A., Martin, J., McConnell, A., & Biles, T. (2020). States Decrease Their Required Secondary Transition Planning Age: Federal Policy Must Change. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 31(2)

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