

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

Summary of Important Information (plain language)

Introduction

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who have a paid job in high school are more likely to have a paid job after high school. When schools and adult disability services work together and focus on employment, people with IDD are more likely to have jobs. Some examples of adult disability services in Arizona include vocational rehabilitation (VR) and Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD).

Vocational Rehabilitation Services:

Services that help a person with a disability find and/or keep a job

Transition-Age Youth:

People with disabilities, ages 14-24, who are preparing for adult life

Youth without disability are more likely to have jobs than youth with disabilities

(American Community Survey, 2021)

In the US, the percentage of youth with intellectual disabilities (ID) who received VR services and got a job is 36.6%. In Arizona, the percentage of youth with ID who received VR services and got a job is 28.3%.

(RSA-911, 2020-2022)



The Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC) worked with the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston (ICI) to evaluate Arizona's VR program. The goal of this work was to understand how well Arizona's VR program is doing in helping transition-age youth with IDD.

Study Overview

This summary is part of the larger report that the ICI wrote called *Analysis of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Transition-Age Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Arizona*. The authors of the report did the following:

1. Reviewed Arizona policy documents for their VR services
2. Reviewed Arizona's data about employment for transition-age youth with disabilities with IDD
3. Did interviews and held focus groups with people who know about Arizona VR, including:
 - VR staff
 - staff from the Department of Education and DDD
 - local school districts
 - VR vendors
 - advocates
 - youth with IDD and their families who have received services from Arizona VR in the past three years

Here, we share the findings and recommendations for next steps for Arizona VR.

Finding 1: Transition-age youth with ID in Arizona who received VR services are less likely to leave VR with a job compared to the national average. Most youth who did leave VR with a job are white.

Arizona benefits from a racially diverse population. More Native Americans live in Arizona than in many other places in the US. Yet people with ID who are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) are not working the same amount as white people with ID in Arizona. Many people who were interviewed for this report said that Arizona VR staff did not have cultural understanding of BIPOC, Hispanic and Latino, and immigrant communities. Staff ignored cultural communication preferences, such as phone calls or letters in the mail instead of emails.

Language was another barrier to VR services. Arizona's VR website is not accessible in all the most common languages spoken in Arizona homes. There are not enough resources for youth and families who have trouble reading. One person shared that in their community, most youth who speak languages other than English are missing out on VR services.

Finding 2: Students in rural communities in Arizona are less likely to have jobs than students in urban and suburban areas. Students in rural communities are also more likely to live in poverty than students in urban and suburban areas.

Many students in rural Arizona communities do not know they can use VR services. In these rural areas, many people rely on service information from their friends and families. Friends and family do not necessarily know a lot about what VR can offer.

Arizona is a big state and has many rural communities. This can make it hard for VR counselors to get to know youth who live in some of those rural areas. This also makes it hard for students in some places to feel like VR counselors are members of their community. If students don't have relationships with VR counselors, they may have more trouble learning about VR services. Without this relationship with VR, students and their communities are less likely to believe that youth with IDD are capable of getting jobs. It is also hard for students with IDD to learn about the variety of businesses and job openings in the community, and how their friends and families can support them in these jobs.

Here are some recommendations:

- VR must have more opportunities for specific cultural competency training. Cultural competency training is training that helps us better understand our own cultures and other people's cultures. Cultural competency training can help us understand and respect cultural differences. Cultural competency training can also help staff learn how their actions and behaviors impact the experiences of VR clients who have different life experiences from their own.
- VR should use available demographic information about the local schools and communities. Demographic information is information about people in a community, including information about their race, gender, ethnicity, language, and age. This demographic information can help VR staff build better connections in the community.

Finding 3: There are three key periods when students transition from school to adulthood. In these three periods, youth with IDD develop job goals and take actions to meet their job goals.

Period 1: Learning about employment and living in the community after high school

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS): VR services that help youth with disabilities get ready to have a job. Some examples of Pre-ETS are work readiness training and internships. Youth can get Pre-ETS from VR starting at age 14.

Interagency Governmental Agreement (IGA): an agreement between two or more public agencies. For example, VR and the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) have an IGA where they have agreed on how they would work together to help students with IDD who are transitioning from school to adulthood.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are the earliest time (at age 14) that VR can start working with youth. Pre-ETS help young people learn about employment and living in the community. Pre-ETS offer opportunities for young people to explore career ideas and set goals about careers.

All youth with disabilities ages 14–22 can get Pre-ETS, including youth who are in high school, college, or another educational setting. Youth can get Pre-ETS one-on-one, or in a small group with other youth. Youth can take any of the five Pre-ETS classes as many times as they need to, as long as they don't take the same class more than once a year. VR allows youth to choose when they want to take each of the 5 Pre-ETS classes.

However, many students don't learn about Pre-ETS until they are 16 years old or older. Many people we interviewed shared concerns about how it is not easy to understand how to get Pre-ETS. There is also no way to know how good the organizations are that provide Pre-ETS. VR doesn't know which organizations do the best job helping youth with IDD who get Pre-ETS get and keep jobs.

Here are some recommendations:

- Arizona VR should update their Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA). This IGA is an agreement between VR and the Department of Education. This agreement helps keep the transition process smooth for youth with IDD. We recommend VR make sure that there is a process for the whole state that will help VR and the schools make it easy for youth to learn about Pre-ETS.
- VR should help youth with IDD who have been approved for Pre-ETS figure out how to pick a Pre-ETS provider that will meet their needs.
- VR should develop a way to see if students who use Pre-ETS get jobs after high school. This will help VR determine how well Pre-ETS is working and what changes, if any, need to be made.

Period 2: Exploring and planning for education and employment

Almost everyone we interviewed felt that youth with IDD need more opportunities for more paid work experiences. The people we interviewed also felt like youth with IDD should spend more time using job development services that can help them discover their employment goals before leaving school.

For youth with IDD, becoming a VR client helps them with planning for a career, finding a job, and planning for education after high school. Youth who are enrolled in a VR Transition School to Work (TWS) program are VR clients and can access all VR services. Youth in Arizona who are not enrolled in a TSW program can become VR clients by:

1. applying to VR
2. being eligible for VR services
3. agreeing to VR services

VR TSW programs help connect students to VR transition coordinators and local VR counselors. TSW programs also have resources for schools to create best practices for providing transition services, including ways to hire staff. TSW contracts also make sure youth can attend classes that build skills and knowledge.

However, most school districts in Arizona do not have a VR TSW program. There are only 24 TSW programs in all of Arizona's 236 public school districts. Additionally, many VR counselors, school district staff, and VR vendors who work with youth with IDD don't know about individual supported employment services.

Many people do not know how to use labor market data from VR or Arizona@Work to learn about what kinds of jobs are likely to be available in their communities in the future. This makes it hard to know how to support youth to build skills for these jobs.

Here are some recommendations:

- Arizona should publish a list of school districts that have TSW programs along with how many students use it, as well as a description of all the services offered by the TSW. This will help Arizona increase its number of VR TSW contracts.
- If a youth with IDD applies to become a VR client, VR should assume that they want to work and that they can benefit from VR supported employment services.
- VR should develop and distribute a score card for youth and families. This score card will be for youth and families to rate the job and community services they get.

Period 3: Leaving high school for work or more school (for example, college)

Before youth graduate from high school in Arizona, they must set a goal about what they plan to do after they leave high school. The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) and VR staff shared that youth with IDD who work with DDD deserve a better and clearer path to adult services after high school. This smooth transition from school to employment and adult services is important so youth can use the skills they learned in school right away.

Many VR offices with long-term staff reported they had good relationships with DDD and schools in their community. Through their Interagency Governmental Agreement (IGA), VR and DDD meet four times a year to focus on how to remove barriers to employment for VR and DDD clients.

We learned that there is not enough planning to help students who are graduating high school. Many schools in Arizona don't have a full-time staff member who does this work specifically. In many schools, there are not staff who are dedicated to planning the transition from school to adulthood. There is not enough planning between schools and DDD and VR. In Arizona, schools, DDD, and VR do not share the same information about how to help youth set goals for integrated employment.

There is also not a process to make sure that DDD adds important information to a youth's file when they are DDD clients. Specifically, DDD should add information about the youth's participation in Pre-ETS, career exploration, work-based learning, and other job development services while they are in school.

Here are some recommendations:

- When youth are young, VR must share options with youth and families about what youth can do after high school. VR must share what they can do to help youth transition to adulthood. VR must share information with youth and families so youth and families can advocate for the services that will help them meet their goals.
- VR and the Department of Education should work together on a committee to figure out how to improve ways to share information about youth with ID between schools and VR.
- VR must work with other partners (such as DDD and schools) to develop a timeline about what services a youth should be receiving from middle school through high school to make sure that they are able to get good jobs once they leave high school.

Conclusion

This study found that Arizona's VR services for transition-age youth with IDD had some major barriers. Some of these barriers are:

- Youth have few job experiences while in school
- VR, DDD, and other partners do not give enough support to help youth with IDD get jobs in the community
- VR and DDD do not collaborate well enough with each other and with the education systems
- Everyone must do a better job working together to focus on integrated employment
- Even though this report is about VR, many groups in Arizona must make changes in how they do things so that youth with IDD can benefit from VR services. Arizona must not accept that how things currently are is good enough. Youth with IDD in Arizona deserve to have the chance to help their state's economy grow and strengthen in the future.