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Meeting the Challenge: Innovation in One State Rehabilitation System's Approach to Transition

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Abstract: This article describes a pilot program that used local rehabilitation facilities to address the career-education needs of visually impaired students aged 14–21 in three Florida communities. The extensive planning, data collection, and evaluation process will allow this project to be improved and expanded throughout the state.

Meeting the transition needs of students with visual impairments (that is, students who are blind or who have low vision) presents challenges to educators and rehabilitation personnel. The most compelling evidence of these unmet needs is the poor postschool employment and independent living outcomes of young adults with visual impairments compared to both people without disabilities and to young adults with other disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, & Newman, 1993).

In her review of the literature on transition, Nagle (2001) identified agency collaboration, access to

vocational assessment and training, social skills training, systematic career education, participation in part-time and paid summer employment, and the involvement of families and students in the transition process as best practices in transition services for youths with disabilities. She suggested that poor outcome measures for students with visual impairments may be due, in part, to a rehabilitation system that is "unable to meet the needs of youths with visual impairments in the 21st century" (p. 735) and that needs to adopt more innovative approaches to transition services.

In this article, we describe the process used by the Florida Division of Blind Services (DBS) to identify the necessary elements in a summer transition project. On the basis of the successes and barriers identified in three pilot projects, standards and indicators were developed and a statewide program was implemented in summer 2003.

Florida plans for statewide transition services

In 1999, the Florida DBS identified the development of innovative approaches to transition services as a critical need to be addressed in the upcoming fiscal year. As an initial step, it contracted with a leading expert in the transition of students with visual impairments to provide training in transition skills to its counselors who were responsible for the transition

of Florida's youths with visual impairments. As part of this training, all transition counselors were introduced to the principles of the "Transition Tote" materials developed by Wolffe and Johnson (1997) and were given materials that described techniques for meeting the career-education needs of children and adolescents with visual impairments (Wolffe, 1999).

The Transition Tote System is a career-development tool that was developed specifically for use by students with visual impairments. It consists of training materials and a soft-sided organizer (tote). The training materials include lessons that were designed to assist students with visual impairment to explore personal characteristics and the world of work and to develop job-seeking and job-keeping skills. These lessons require students to think about and engage in experiences related to work. The tote itself is used to facilitate instruction in organizational skills and the skills for impressing others with one's competence.

Concurrently, DBS began to plan for the implementation of a statewide transition project through which the needs of students with visual impairments could be met. The framework of this transition project was a gradual increase in the transition skills and work participation of students through programs based on the Transition Tote System (Wolffe & Johnson, 1997) offered over consecutive summers at local agencies. As part of their planning, the project's coordinators carefully considered

including the following components of successful school-to-work programs for students with visual impairments: paid work, collaboration, job-readiness training, self-initiated job searches, the acquisition of transferable skills, the inclusion of diverse groups of young people, the limited use of supports, the development of realistic goals, internal and external evaluations, instruction in self-advocacy and volunteerism, and enthusiastic service providers (Wolffe, 1997b).

It was decided that the delivery of services for the program would be contracted to local community rehabilitation programs because of the lack of resources to provide services within the state agency. Three agencies were selected to participate in the pilot project: Independence for the Blind of West Florida (IBW) in Pensacola; the Center for Independence, Technology, and Education (CITE) in Orlando; and the Watson Center in St. Petersburg. These agencies were selected because they were representative of agencies throughout the state with regard to the density of their populations, geographic areas served, and diversity of clients.

Collaborative planning

In January 2001, a work group was assigned the task of establishing guidelines for the pilot programs. Facilitated by an individual from the Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program, the

work group consisted of representatives from the Florida DBS, the Florida Department of Education, the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, the three agencies involved in the pilot project, and a university educator who was familiar with the transition needs of students with visual impairments. The tasks for the first meeting were to (1) identify program and operational issues, (2) outline steps to be taken to resolve the identified issues, and (3) develop strategies for evaluating the pilot program. The group began by identifying anticipated issues, including the role of each service provider in referrals, the selection of students, the assessment of students' needs, the development of a plan, and the provision of needed work experiences.

Criteria for selecting students

It was established that referrals for the pilot programs were to be made by selecting eligible students from the caseload of the DBS transition counselor, since funding for the program required that students be vocational rehabilitation consumers. Input from the students' teachers was to be used in selecting appropriate referrals. During the development of selection criteria, it was decided that the student participants must be at either the informational or instructional level of cognitive functioning (see Wolffe, 1997a, for a complete description of this method of categorizing clients by intervention needs). The work-group participants decided that the inclusion

of students at the advocacy level, who require an extraordinary amount of individual attention to learn skills, would detract from the programs' ability to provide an appropriate experience for other students. All the work-group participants agreed on the need to develop transition programs for advocacy-level students in the future.

Development of goals for students

To evaluate students' progress and the mastery and retention of skills, members of the work group decided that individualized program plans would be developed for each student participant. Two sources of information were to be used in the development of these plans: a comprehensive functional assessment, conducted by the agency, and the Transition Competencies Checklist, a self-report instrument that was designed for this project to identify students' perceptions of their competence in the 10 core compensatory-skill areas outlined in the Transition Tote System (Wolffe & Johnson, 1997). The work-group members recommended that plans should include an indication of the responsibilities of the student, the instructor or instructors, and the DBS counselor, and that the plans should be reviewed carefully during the postprogram evaluation process.

Anticipated issues for pilot programs

The work group discussed the logistics of the program

and set some minimum standards to ensure that the projects would be comparable. It was decided that each program should include a minimum of 100 total contact hours per student but that the distribution of those hours among activities would be left to the discretion of each program. A ratio of one instructor per three to four students, with a minimum of two instructors per pilot program, was required to facilitate the individualization component of the program. Agencies were encouraged to train and use volunteers and interns to assist with social activities and other various tasks, with restrictions pertaining to instructional activity. Each pilot program was to have a minimum of six planning sessions before the start date of the program, with involvement by representatives from both the responsible agency and the local DBS office. Planning sessions were to address local concerns and procedural issues; to assign roles; and to make decisions pertaining to lesson plans, documentation, social activities, and work experiences. Transportation issues were also to be addressed at the local level.

The DBS counselors were to recommend students who were ready to participate in a work experience so that appropriate work sites could be identified. Work experiences were to be developed by DBS counselors with assistance from job coaches and DBS customer-service specialists prior to the start of the program.

Members of the work group performed a

troubleshooting exercise to identify anticipated barriers related to the implementation of this project and to develop strategies to minimize these barriers. In addition to staffing and space issues, additional barriers included time for developing and planning the program, integration of the new program with existing services, budgetary concerns, involvement of the local school system, identification of resources for meaningful work experiences in the community, and recruitment of volunteers. It was decided that most of these issues would need to be resolved at the local level.

Each pilot site was asked to formulate a budget to determine the cost of running the program. These budgets were to be sent to the DBS state office for analysis and proper allocation of funds. Overall funding for this pilot project was \$64,263, with funding provided to each agency by DBS in the amount of \$20,000. The additional dollars were used to purchase Transition Tote Systems and training materials.

It was strongly recommended that teachers of students with visual impairments from local schools be integrated into the program-planning process as much as possible to provide input on students' levels of skills and to assist in developing lesson plans using the goals outlined in each student's Individualized Plan of Employment (IPE). Establishing links with the school system was seen as an important part of this program,

since students need to continue to practice newly learned skills throughout the school year.

Pilot programs

The pilot sites were given the flexibility to develop their local programs with minimal interference from the DBS administrators. The rationale for this flexibility was the desire to learn from the creativity of the individual pilot projects, so that the strong points of each program could be extrapolated to develop a comprehensive program for statewide implementation during summer 2003. Beyond the guidelines established by the work group, the only requirements were that the programs were to be based on the principles and lessons outlined in the Transition Tote System (Wolffe & Johnson, 1997); that programs were to provide individualized services that were based on students' needs, as determined by the Transition Competencies Checklist; and that service providers were to collaborate with each agency and entity that had an interest in the students' transition.

Although a team member from each site was trained in the concepts of the Transition Tote System (Wolffe & Johnson, 1997), there was not enough time or funds to train the entire transition team at each site. Therefore, a reference guide was developed to assist the team in developing lesson plans. This guide listed each of the 10 compensatory skills that are represented on the Transition Competencies Checklist. For each skill, the

guide referenced lessons in the Transition Tote System. After individual students' needs were identified, the guide was used to determine which lessons were appropriate for each student and where they could be found in the Transition Tote System and in supporting materials. Supplemental materials, including *Skills for Success* (Wolffe, 1999) and *Career Counseling for People with Disabilities* (Wolffe, 1997a), were provided to each program and were appropriately referenced in the guide.

Independence for the Blind of West Florida

Agency information. Independence for the Blind of West Florida (IB West) is a small agency that usually employs 12 people who work with individuals with visual impairments in the far western part of Florida. Located in Pensacola, with a population of 294,500 people (3% Hispanic, 21% black, and 71% white), the agency provides services to the 10 surrounding counties, most of which are rural and sparsely populated with a large number of individuals of low socioeconomic status. IB West had offered summer transition programs in the previous nine years.

Selection process. The DBS transition counselor made referrals with input from the IB West instructors, and students were selected according to their availability and appropriateness for the program. As recommended, the selection criteria limited the program to informational and instructional learners; a

total of six students eventually participated in this program, although not all of them were able to start on time because of other commitments (see [Table 1](#) for demographic information on these students). All six students were deemed ready to be engaged in a work experience.

Program elements. The program was offered daily from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for six weeks. One day each week was designated for field trips, with the other four days identified for instruction at the center or participation in a work experience. Transportation was provided by bus, paratransit, community transportation providers, and family members. Lessons were partially based on the Transition Tote System, but also included elements from previous transition programs offered by the agency. On most days, students were involved in preparing their own lunches. Speakers provided information on safety in the workplace, notetakers, and the DBS vending program. Three college students with visual impairments talked about their school and work experiences. The students toured the public library and learned how to gain access to information about jobs through library resources and via the Internet. They also had the opportunity to interview a number of workers who were visually impaired on their jobs. As a social activity, the students were taught to play goal ball. All the students participated in some kind of work experience.

Program issues. IB West reported that there was not

enough time for planning, since some students did not commit to attend the program until the start date or afterward. Teachers of students with visual impairments were usually unavailable, leading to little involvement of the school system, which contributed to a reliance on self-report data that was inconsistent with the students' actual levels of competence. As a result, many plans based on these assessments were inaccurate. A shortage of staff led to conflicts with existing agency programs. There were some difficulties with work experiences because of unexpected delays and the lack of staff to monitor the students' job performance.

Feedback. Focus groups provided insights into the perceptions of the individuals who were involved in the pilot program. The students indicated that they learned new skills and that they would not only return to the program next year, but would recommend friends to the program. They reported that there was a good balance between instruction and social activities and that the program adequately covered their learning needs. Areas of positive feedback included job shadowing, mock interviews, field trips to job sites, information on how to search for and maintain a job, the rights of visually impaired persons, and safety in the workplace. The students also reported that they learned how to manage money through budgeting. For the future, these students recommended that materials should be recorded because of the quantity of reading involved in most lessons.

Center for Independence, Technology, and Education

Agency information. The Center for Independence, Technology, and Education (CITE) is located in Orlando, a geographically large metropolis of approximately 900,000 people (19% Hispanic, 18% black, and 58% white). CITE's Orlando branch has 24 employees and serves three counties. CITE had offered a transition program, based on the Transition Tote System, during the previous three summers.

Selection process. The DBS transition counselor identified appropriate referrals and mailed letters to students and their parents and to local teachers of students with visual impairments to inform them of the program. Interested students were interviewed and completed the Transition Competencies Checklist with assistance from an agency instructor. Eligible students, who were aged 14–21, were required to be enrolled in a standard diploma curriculum or be scheduled to take the test for the general equivalency diploma. Eight students aged 14–19 were selected as participants; 3 of these participants spoke Spanish as their primary language (see [Table 2](#) for demographic information about these students). The agency also asked the students' parents to complete a copy of the checklist to acquire another perspective on the students' skills. Based on student interest and evaluations conducted as part of this program, two students were selected to

participate in paid work experiences.

Program elements. The CITE program was offered for 6 hours per day, 3 days each week, for 5 weeks. After the day's agenda was reviewed, a brief lecture on the topic of the day, taken from the Transition Tote materials, was presented, followed by individual work on compensatory skills. The students prepared lunch every Friday and practiced table etiquette, manners, setting a table, and cleaning up. Guest speakers from the community were scheduled to present information on a variety of topics. At the end of the day, the day's work was reviewed. The students participated in a field trip to a local community college and in an athletic field trip during which they learned to play soccer. Transportation was provided by paratransit, family members, or the agency's van. One student used the bus system to get to and from his work experience.

Program issues. There was not enough time in the five-week period to cover all the lessons and to have as many job-shadowing and work experiences as were preferred. Also, the students did not have the computer and handwriting skills necessary to complete exercises in a timely manner. Therefore, the curriculum had to be adjusted to accommodate time constraints and to provide extra time for the students to complete their assignments. The student-to-instructor ratio was too high, partially because of existing programs and partially because of late referrals to the program. Of all the pilot sites, this program created the greatest

involvement of families and the school system. The strong relationship between the agencies and the staff helped to promote a solid program.

Feedback. The CITE pilot program incorporated many elements that were deemed excellent. It did an outstanding job of collecting data and involving the parents and students' specialist teachers in the program. A great deal of teamwork occurred during the planning and implementation stages. Considerable time and effort were spent on creating lesson plans and documenting progress. The plans were completed correctly by using the information obtained from the students' Transition Competencies Checklists.

The primary area noted for improvement was that the agency tried to incorporate too much into the five-week period. Plans included more competencies than could reasonably be accomplished during the allotted time, and the individualization component of the program was compromised because skills that were identified in the students' checklists were compiled and all students had to follow the same curriculum. This problem may be remedied in future programs by reducing the student-to-instructor ratio.

Focus groups provided insights into the students' perceptions of the program. The students reported that they enjoyed the field trip to the community college and that they gained valuable information about job skills and filling out applications. They liked learning

about budgeting and using computers. All the students reported that they enjoyed the socialization aspect of the program and stated that they would like to have more activities in the future and less indoor class time. The students also requested more job-shadowing and work experiences. When asked whether they would return to the program the following summer, most students replied that they would—if the program were less like school and included more hands-on activities. Most students reported that they would recommend the program to their friends.

Watson Center

Agency information. The Watson Center is located in St. Petersburg in Pinellas County, a highly populous (921,000 residents), but relatively racially homogeneous (83% white, 5% Hispanic, and 9% black), area of southwest Florida. The Watson Center employs approximately 24 full-time staff to serve the residents of Pinellas County. Although the facility has provided one-on-one services to youths for many years, the pilot program was the first transition program that the facility had hosted.

Selection process. DBS referred students who were relatively self-sufficient and available during the five-week period. Local teachers of students with visual impairments were made aware of the program, but gave no input and made no referrals. One advocacy-level student was accepted in the program, with the

understanding that her DBS counselor would provide the extra assistance that was needed (see [Table 3](#) for demographic information on the 12 students who participated in this program). The Transition Competencies Checklist was completed by each student before the program started, with assistance from the DBS transition counselor; the instructor; or a representative from the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, which some of the students attended. Four students whose evaluations indicated adequate preparation for the potential of success in a work environment were assigned to paid work experiences.

Program elements. The program was offered for five weeks from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Tuesdays through Fridays. On a typical day, the students would spend one hour working on skills in the computer lab and then move to the classroom to work on compensatory skills. After they prepared and ate lunch, they proceeded to their work or job-shadowing experiences. On days when no job-shadowing experience was scheduled, the students returned to the classroom to continue working on compensatory skills. Fridays were reserved for social activities off-site. The students built job-seeking skills through mock interviews and discussions with workers while job shadowing. An outing to the local zoo gave them an opportunity to work on socialization skills and to receive career information from the zoo's employees. The students later used this information to write about jobs that they found interesting. This exercise allowed the students to

practice their writing, word-processing, and keyboarding skills. Budgeting skills were also practiced on the trip. Most days the students prepared lunch and cleaned the kitchen to help build their independent living skills. Transportation was provided through the Watson Center's contract with a local taxi cab company. A local teacher of students with visual impairments served as one of the two instructors, providing an essential link to the school system. Parents attended a program orientation and a closing reception at which they had the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback pertaining to the program. The agency held a closing reception for which the students prepared the food. During this reception, exit interviews were conducted, in which the students' strengths and weaknesses, as well as problem areas, were addressed and certificates of completion were given to the students.

Program issues. One-third of the students did not have work-appropriate clothing before they started the program. Therefore, the center purchased golf shirts for the students to wear while job shadowing, which was an unbudgeted expense. Work experiences were not developed in a timely manner. Two students, both of whom reported that they were forced to attend the program by their parents, ultimately were dismissed from the program because of attendance and behavioral problems. Young volunteers did not take the initiative to work with the students.

Feedback. Hosting an orientation session was an excellent strategy to provide information about the program and to get the parents involved. At this meeting, the Watson Center distributed a printed list of the program's rules and regulations that clearly defined the program's expectations for the students. Plans for the students were developed properly and used the information gained from the preprogram evaluation. The exercises that were included in the students' files were relevant to the program's goals. A student evaluation sheet was useful for following the progress of individual students, and weekly reports from employers were beneficial in determining the students' progress in the jobs. The closing reception not only helped to involve the parents, but was a convenient time at which to complete the exit interviews with relevant individuals. One negative aspect of this program was that communication difficulties existed among the agency's staff, the DBS staff, and local teachers of students with visual impairments, a situation that may be prevented by allowing more planning time in the future.

The students reported that they enjoyed learning about different jobs. They also liked the field trips, the socialization element, and learning about time management and using credit and debit cards. The aspect of the program that the students liked the least was the amount of time spent in the classroom. The students reported that the program was not as individualized as they had anticipated. They requested

that more job-shadowing and work experiences be offered in future programs and recommended that career-interest inventories be used to help determine work experiences that are congruent with their interests. Of the 11 students who participated in the focus group, 6 said that they would attend the program again the following year, 3 said they would not because they did not learn anything new, and 2 said they would return if the program were more individualized.

Program evaluation

The pilot programs used a four-part evaluation system to determine the success of their programs and to identify components that were worthy of replication. First, formative data were collected from each site by having the local-level teams complete a three-part questionnaire. The first part covered the planning period and was completed at the conclusion of that phase of the project. The second part, completed at the end of the project, asked about the program's schedules, transportation to and from the program and work experiences, involvement of the school system, involvement of families, adjustments to the curriculum, progress and barriers to progress, and problem solving. Approximately one month after the completion of the projects, the final portion of the questionnaire was completed. This questionnaire asked how the exit interviews were completed; how the formative and summative data were gathered; and about any follow-

up that had been done with the students, their teachers, and family members.

Summative data were collected for the students (see Tables 1–3) and facilities (see [Table 4](#)). Data on the facilities included the number of social activities and field trips that were completed; the total number of plans that were developed; the number of goals and indicators that were set and how many of these goals were mastered; the number of staff members, including a breakdown of instructors, volunteers, and interns, who were involved; the number of employers who were involved; and the number of staff hours that were needed. Differences among these programs are evident. It is interesting that the program that served the most students (Watson Center) reported that it needed the fewest staff and staff hours—just slightly more than a tenth of the staff hours required by IB West, which served half the number of students.

Satisfaction surveys and focus groups were conducted to determine how the projects were perceived locally. The DBS administrators visited each of the pilot sites during the last week of the project to conduct focus groups with the students, instructors, and staff. The focus groups were held separately and confidentially to promote honest opinions. In these groups, the students were asked about what they learned, what they would change, and their general impressions of the project. During the focus groups with agency staff members, questions were asked about the staff members' roles,

whether the particular project's objectives were met, and if the project adequately served the needs of the informational-and instructional-level students in the area. Local DBS staff were contacted via telephone and were asked the same questions as the agency staff members pertaining to the outcome of the particular project. DBS transition counselors contacted the parents, teachers of students with visual impairments, facility administrators, and employers to obtain their perceptions.

Follow-up: Planning for statewide implementation

After the pilot projects were completed, the work group reconvened to analyze the data that were collected, identify themes and features that supported success, and look for evidence of a positive impact. Features of the transition program that were determined to support success included collaboration among agencies, a link with the school system that promotes the year-round practice of learned skills, clearly delineated roles and responsibilities, individualized planning, and motivation of students. The focus groups of students revealed a preference for hands-on activities and work-related experiences. Many aspects of the program provided evidence of a positive impact, even after just one summer. The students reported that they developed friendships through social activities and interaction and felt a genuine sense of belonging. The program promoted

self-confidence and self-esteem, as evidenced by the students' reports of changes in their career goals and decisions to attend college or to continue in high school. In addition, the students reported a better understanding of work. Both the students and their family members gained an increased awareness of the students' range of abilities.

The work-group members used information obtained from the projects to begin to troubleshoot and plan for the next summer's programs. They recommended that resources, including staff, space, budget, and time, be increased. DBS agreed to provide funding for up to two qualified instructors for each project, if needed, to meet the teacher-to-student ratio. The work group emphasized the importance of efforts to create linkages among agencies, the school system, and the students' families. Other critical issues that the work group identified included the early identification of appropriate students, the selection of appropriate work experiences for eligible students, and the implications of this program for existing community programs (such as summer camps for students with visual impairments) and programs at participating agencies. Finally, the work-group members advised that an aggressive public awareness program be instituted to ensure that eligible students have equal access to services.

Standards and indicators were developed for the program to provide a framework for services and to

ensure that the essential elements of the program are maintained when it is implemented statewide. The work group outlined seven components that will provide the foundation for the program: referral and intake, evaluation and assessment, planning, service delivery, reporting, family involvement, school and interagency involvement, and personnel training. Among the specific recommendations were these:

- Referrals must be finalized 60 days before the start of the program, and referred students must be DBS vocational rehabilitation consumers who are participating in an IPE and who are functioning at the informational or instructional level of cognitive functioning.
- Local programs will develop a procedures manual that identifies the information that is to be included in the referral packet.
- Families and students are to be oriented to the program and service delivery process before the program starts.
- The Transition Competencies Checklist is to be completed by the students at least 30 days before the program starts. The DBS transition counselor will assist a student, if necessary, and will probe the student when more information is required. A copy of the completed checklist will be sent to each parent or guardian for comment.
- Specialists who work with the students at school

will be asked to complete a modified version of the checklist for reliability purposes.

- At least 30 days before the program starts, the agency will complete a comprehensive functional assessment for each referred student that will include, at a minimum, assessments of the student's O&M and an independent living skills.
- The agency instructor and the DBS counselor will coordinate other assessments on an individual basis as needed. Assessments may include career-interest inventories and access-technology assessments.
- A local-level coordinator will be assigned by DBS to coordinate local work groups and to facilitate the development of local-level policies and procedures. Each team member will assist in the development of a local-level action plan.
- At a minimum, monthly program-planning meetings will be conducted beginning in January of each year. The meetings should include the agency instructor, the DBS local-level coordinator, the DBS transition counselor, the DBS customer-service specialist, and the students' specialist teachers (when available).
- Lesson plans will be developed on the basis of the Transition Tote System and the individual needs of the students, as identified in applicable assessments.

- The role of each service provider will be clearly delineated at the local level. The provider, at a minimum, will adhere to the roles and responsibilities of the program that are defined in the standards.
- Each program will have a minimum of one full-time instructor for every three students.
- Each program will offer a minimum of 100 hours and a maximum of 120 hours of instruction, work experience, and community and social interaction. Each student's program will contain a minimum of 20% of classroom instruction that is based on the individual needs of the student. For each student, individual and group lesson plans will include the following proportion of activities: activities of daily living, 25%; active recreation and leisure, 25%; and career and vocational activities, 50%. Exceptions will be made on the basis of students' individual needs as identified in the required assessments.
- Students will be informally evaluated after 25 hours of instruction to determine if more individualized programming is necessary.
- The instructor will maintain a daily case note for each student, and weekly time logs and reports will be requested of the work supervisor for work-experience students.
- A personal exit interview with each student will

be held to discuss the student's progress and intermediate and long-term goals. Participants at this meeting will include the student, the instructor, the DBS transition counselor, the DBS specialist teacher, and family members (when available).

- The instructor will provide a summative report of the exit interview to the DBS transition counselor, the student, and the student's family. The DBS transition counselor will provide a copy of the report to the teacher of students with visual impairments.
- The parent or legal guardian of the student will provide a signed release form indicating the student's and family's commitment to the program.
- Families will receive written notification of orientation sessions, appropriate planning sessions, and exit interviews.
- Local teachers of students with visual impairments and their program coordinators will be invited to participate in program planning and instruction.
- The DBS transition counselor will be responsible for coordinating assessment and planning with the Individualized Education Program teams for students who receive services in the local school system, as well as other associated agencies.

- Providers of direct services will meet minimum educational standards for certification according to the instructional area.
- The local program will develop roles, training, and orientation guidelines for interns and volunteers.
- At a minimum, lead instructional staff and DBS transition counselors will have participated in statewide program training provided by DBS on the Transition Tote System and on working with adolescents.
- Information about the number of goals set, addressed, and mastered; specific activities and field trips; and the number of staff and volunteer hours required to implement the program will be gathered through a review of documentation, rather than from the facilities' reports.

Statewide implementation

The DBS administrator responsible for the development and implementation of the transition program visited each of the 12 DBS district offices during the summer and fall of 2002 to discuss statewide implementation of the program. Local agencies in each area were introduced to the project to determine their interest in hosting the program. Each geographic area was assessed for the need for a transition program and for the capacity to provide the outlined services. It was determined that 11 of the 12

districts would be able to support a program the following summer.

An orientation meeting was held in October 2002 to review program standards and indicators and to discuss planning materials, assessments, roles and responsibilities, recommended time frames, and financial considerations. A local-level breakout session was included to allow communication between the DBS and agency representatives so that they could schedule the first planning meeting, begin to identify referrals, discuss an action plan, and begin to develop a manual of policies and procedures based on the transition program's standards and indicators.

Statewide training on the Transition Tote System was sponsored by the DBS in March 2003. A university professor who specializes in transition services provided additional training on working with adolescents and preparing them for the transition from school to work. This training session provided an additional opportunity to share information and to answer additional questions pertaining to the program.

Conclusion

The Florida DBS has taken seriously Nagle's (2001) challenge that the rehabilitation system needs to adopt more innovative approaches to transition services in the 21st century. Instead of waiting for adolescents with significant visual impairments to enter the

rehabilitation system without the skills and competencies necessary to obtain and maintain employment, this agency has committed itself to ensuring that this group of future consumers is prepared to participate effectively in the services that it offers as they leave school. During the past four years, DBS has obligated staff, appropriated funding, conferred with recognized experts, experimented with program models, and created standards and indicators for summer transition programs that will be locally designed to meet the needs of individual students for additional training in community, recreational, daily living, and vocational skills.

It is anticipated that program outcomes will include an increase in students' integration into the community via enhanced independent living skills and social skills, as well as strengthened partnerships among service providers, the school system, and DBS. More important, future follow-up and data analyses will reveal whether the statewide implementation of this innovative program has achieved its primary outcome: the dramatic change in the ability of students to make career choices independently and to participate in employment.

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