

CHAPTER 5:

Connecting Activities

This chapter examines the connecting activities necessary to assist HS/HT participants as they transition to their next phase in life—one that will hopefully include additional technical training, postsecondary education, and/or work leading to economic self-sufficiency. As such, this chapter focuses on the services and activities requiring support from individuals or organizations outside of the educational setting, such as tutors to improve academic performance, assistive technology to address accommodation needs, and transportation. Youth participating in HS/HT programs will also need to work with other agencies as they pursue options in postsecondary education and high-tech careers.

Component 1: Mental and Physical Health Services

Although all students need easy access to mental and physical health services, students with disabilities may require such services on a more regular basis. To address the needs of youth with disabilities, including those with mental health needs, HS/HT program coordinators need to work closely with the schools to make sure the mental and physical health services they have are readily accessible to students with disabilities. Consider that youth with mental health needs often face unemployment, underemployment, and discrimination when they enter the workforce. Employment data indicate that individuals with serious mental illness have the lowest level of employment of any group of people with disabilities. Large numbers of youth with

both diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health needs who are transitioning into young adulthood, to the world of work, and to postsecondary education are therefore likely to experience significant difficulties. Research has also shown that youth with mental health needs are over-represented in the foster care and juvenile justice system, in school disciplinary cases, and among high school dropouts.

Recently, a growing number of strategies and resources have been emerging to support youth with mental health needs in achieving independence, self-sufficiency, employment, and postsecondary education goals. Research is showing that, similar to youth with other types of disabilities, youth with mental health needs clearly benefit from exposure to career preparation and related youth development activities such as mentoring. As these youth have gained entry into the workforce, their experiences have shown that youth with mild to moderate mental health needs often require minimal or no employment supports.

While HS/HT staff may be able to identify youth who may be in need of mental and physical health services, staff may not have the expertise or credentials to provide such services. Therefore, they need to be knowledgeable about the mental and physical health services that are available in the community, and know how to refer youth participating in HS/HT to those services when deemed appropriate. In some cases, this may mean working with medical facilities and community mental health groups to ensure that their services are fully accessible to youth with disabilities.

HS/HT staff should also be aware of the “Healthy and Ready to Work” (HRTW) initiative funded as part of the Social Security Act, Title V Maternal and Child Health Block grant to states, under the Division of Services to Children with Special Health Care Needs. One goal of HRTW is to help states develop effective mechanisms to achieve a system of care for children and youth with special health needs and their families by 2010. The following six national performance measures (NPM) serve as a guide to states in meeting this HRTW goal. The performance measures include

- early and continuous screening,
- families and youth as partners in decision-making,
- medical home,
- health insurance,
- organization of services, and
- transition to adulthood.

The needs of transitioning youth are infused throughout all six performance measures, with a particular emphasis on the sixth measure, “transition,” which looks at the percent of children with special health care needs, ages 0 to 18, whose families report the community-based service system is organized so they can use it easily. Examples of how this is measured include such things as sponsorship of Youth Advisory Councils, youth developing skills and becoming spokespeople; staff members talking directly to youth; youth involved in independence building and work experiences; person-centered planning and mentoring programs; work opportunities; independent living training, transportation and technology; and connecting youth to other youth and adult mentors. For additional information visit the HRTW National Resource Center at <<http://www.hrtw.org>>.

In addition to generic health and mental health services, youth with disabilities, particularly those with significant disabilities, may need personal assistance services (PAS). Depending on the nature and severity of the disability, a young person may need assistance in locating attendants and personal assistance services, readers, interpreters, or other such specialized services.

Ohio HS/HT has a relationship with the Ohio Bureau for Children with Medical Handicaps. The Bureau assists with the costs of various assistive technologies to address the needs of youth with physical and sensory disabilities to keep these youth in school. A representative of the Bureau serves on the HS/HT State Leadership Council.

Online Resources to Consider

Center for Personal Assistance Services provides research, training, dissemination, and technical assistance on issues of personal assistance services (PAS) in the United States. The information covers: the relationship between formal and informal PAS and caregiving support, and the role of assistive technology (AT) in complementing PAS; policies and programs, barriers, and new models for PAS in the home and community; PAS workforce issues related to development, recruitment, retention, and benefits; and workplace models of formal and informal PAS and AT at work. Visit <<http://www.pascenter.org/>>.

Children’s Medical Services Transition Handbook provides assistance in planning for medical needs during the transition from high school to adult life. Visit <<http://www.cms-kids.com/CMSNTransition.htm>>.

Medical Training Curriculum to Improve Care for Persons with Physical Disabilities, produced by the World Institute on Disabilities (WID), contains curriculum and a video developed for medical professionals to guide improved healthcare quality for individuals with physical disabilities. The curriculum, *Treating Adults with Physical Disabilities – Access and Communication*, can be downloaded free of charge at <<http://www.wid.org/news/FinalCurriculumGuide4.doc>>.

Medicines in My Home was developed to help middle school students learn about the safe and effective use of over-the-counter medicines. The website, which is sponsored by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), is designed for use in health education courses. Visit <<http://www.fda.gov/medsinmyhome/>>.

Personal Assistance Services in the Workplace, a publication by the Job Accommodation Network, discusses personal assistance services in the workplace (WPAS) and answers frequently asked questions about WPAS, including its use as an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It contains examples of WPAS to accommodate job applicants and current employees with limitations due to sensory, cognitive, physical, or mental health impairments. It provides a list of WPAS resources and a glossary of WPAS-related terminology. Visit www.jan.wvu.edu/media/PAS.html.

Tunnels and Cliffs: A Guide for Workforce Development Practitioners and Policymakers Serving Youth with Mental Health Needs, a publication by NCWD/Youth, was developed as part of ODEP's initiative to help workforce practitioners, administrators, and policymakers enhance their understanding of youth with mental health needs and the supports necessary to help them transition into the workforce successfully. It includes practical information and resources for youth service practitioners at local One-Stop Career Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, youth programs funded under the Workforce Investment Act, school transition programs, and mental health agencies. It also provides policy makers with information to help them address system and policy obstacles in order to improve service delivery systems for youth with mental health needs. The Guide can be purchased from NCWD/Youth or downloaded for free at www.ncwd-youth.info/.

What's Health Got to Do with It?, published by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, provides high school-level Health Care Transition Curriculum and a related teacher's guide. Download the curriculum for free from the University of South Florida's website. Visit <http://usfpeds.hsc.usf.edu/adolescent/>.

Component 2: Transportation

Although there are 62 federal programs that fund transportation services, transportation continues to be one of the biggest barriers to full integration and employment facing individuals with disabilities. It is also one of the greatest challenges facing HS/HT

programs. Students need access to transportation to participate in HS/HT events, particularly when they are scheduled on weekends and during the summer. Even when HS/HT is conducted as an after-school club, students do not always have access to transportation to get home. For example, some schools reserve their after-school activities buses solely for use by students participating in sports. HS/HT students also need transportation to participate in industry site visits, job shadowing activities, internships, and part-time employment. Unfortunately, providing transportation can become a drain on the fiscal resources of a HS/HT program.

Logistics regarding transportation for HS/HT activities must be planned well in advance, as youth often need transportation to and from activities and public transportation is not always an option. Individual arrangements must be made using creative approaches that provide dependable, affordable transportation, such as car pools, volunteers, bicycles, negotiated discounts with taxi companies, and subsidies from cities or counties.

To address the transportation challenges facing HS/HT, students and all of the partners need to work together to find transportation solutions so that youth will be able to fully participate in program activities. Each HS/HT site needs to check with their state's department of transportation and with local government offices to determine if their community is involved in initiatives designed to improve access to transportation for persons with disabilities.

For youth with disabilities, particularly those who are blind or visually impaired, access to community orientation and mobility training can be critically important to facilitating independence. Such youth may need assistance in finding accessible bus routes, negotiating bus routes or the subway system, finding accessible housing, and getting to the local health clinic. HS/HT programs should include travel training as a component of the program so youth can learn to travel on public transportation. This can be done by asking someone from an adult disability organization (e.g., a Center for Independent Living) or a program for the visually impaired (e.g., the National Federation of the Blind or the American Council of the Blind) to lead a session on travel training.

Vocational Rehabilitation can also be an excellent resource. Many states offer accessible transportation programs with reduced fares for people with disabilities. Consider inviting representatives of public transportation centers to participate.

Consider the following:

- If public transportation is an accessible option, work with the family and ask them to practice with the young person.
- If the student has a valid driver's license and a mode of transportation, he or she can supply transportation.
- Parents/guardians might be able to provide a car pool.
- The job site might have information available on car pooling.
- Conduct your HS/HT activities after-school during the same time frame as other clubs and sports activities so that students can use the school's after-school activities bus.
- Partner with a school system to secure a school bus during off-school hours to provide transportation within the district. Depending on the circumstances, the HS/HT program may be asked to pay the salary of the school bus driver for the time spent transporting students, or the school district may cover this cost.
- Partner with a disability community organization that provides transportation to its clients.
- If HS/HT program staff use their cars to provide transportation for students, make sure they have appropriate liability coverage.

Online Resources to Consider

CTAA, the Community Transportation Association of America, has a publication, "Linking People to the Workplace: Transportation Strategies and Practices," that provides technical assistance, practices, and strategies to assist workforce development professionals and other professionals in providing accessible transportation services for low-income

individuals and persons with disabilities in their communities. Visit: <<http://www.ctaa.org/ntrc/atj/toolkit/index.asp>>.

Easter Seals Project ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation in Our Nation) promotes cooperation between the transportation industry and the disability community to increase mobility for people with disabilities. Project ACTION maintains a clearinghouse and offers various resources, training and technical assistance, including those specifically designed to facilitate the use of public transportation for students and young adults with disabilities. One such resource, "Public transportation: The route to freedom," a transportation education program for students with disabilities in grades 8-12, provides curriculum developed to teach students in secondary schools about concepts, skills, and behaviors necessary to use public transportation. Visit <http://projectaction.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=ESPA_resources_supporting_young_adults>.

United We Ride, a five-part collaborative initiative of the U.S. Departments of Transportation, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Education, is designed to break down the barriers between programs and set the stage for local partnerships that generate common sense solutions to transportation challenges. Their *Framework for Action* is a self-assessment tool that states and communities can use to identify areas of success and highlight the actions needed to improve the coordination of human service transportation. This tool can be used to conduct resource mapping exercises to assess the transportation systems in communities. Visit <<http://www.unitedweride.gov/>>.

Component 3: Academic Tutoring

Tutoring was discussed in Chapter 2 as a part of School-Based Preparatory Experiences. The content of this chapter focuses on HS/HT's role in connecting students with disabilities with tutoring resources available in the community that they can access after they leave the program. Since tutoring is available through many organizations in the community, including schools, HS/HT program staff will need to "scan the environment" to identify and access the tutoring services that work best for a particular HS/HT

student. Below are some suggestions on where to find tutoring services.

- If the young person is currently enrolled in high school, check with the school's guidance department for a list of qualified tutors.
- Tutors may also be obtained through local adult education programs and institutions of higher education.
- Link to after-school programs (often supported by Federal funding under the 21st Century Learning Communities Act).
- Link current participants with other youth who have successfully completed coursework or who have graduated from high school and exited the HS/HT program.
- There may be business-community partnerships or community-at-large mentors who may be qualified and interested in providing tutoring services.
- Program staff can work with school personnel, community organizations, and youth and families to identify areas where academic supports are needed.

Component 4: Financial Planning

Like any young person, HS/HT students can also benefit from training in or exposure to financial planning and management. In some cases, HS/HT students might participate in classes or training programs available to anyone. In other cases, financial planning can be built into a HS/HT activity. For example, participants may be asked to select a job and then be given a salary based on the comparable salary of people currently employed in that job. The students could then be asked to develop a personal budget for one month, including tracking expenditures for rent, utilities, food, transportation, insurance, clothing, and recreation. This exercise is particularly enlightening for youth who have never had responsibility for paying their bills.



Tech-Now in Oklahoma conducts a week-long Summer Institute every year for HS/HT students from across the state. One of the activities included is a visit to the Oklahoma City Zoo. The day begins with a presentation by a staff person who talks about the history of the Zoo and the costs associated with buying and maintaining different animals. Following the presentation, students are divided into groups and given specific resources to plan and develop their own zoo. The resources include 200 acres of land, 4 buildings, a lake, and \$95,000 to purchase animals. Each group develops a layout for their zoo and purchases animals from the bank which is run by parents and sibling. However, once a purchase has been made, the animal cannot be sold back to the bank. Rather, students are encouraged to negotiate with other groups if they decide they want a different animal. Among other things, participating students learn how to work in groups, plan a budget, and negotiate with others.

Delaware HS/HT Partners with Junior Achievement

In Delaware, HS/HT and Junior Achievement (JA) co-sponsored a one-week Career Rally at JA's headquarters which houses an Enterprise Village and Finance Park. Participating youth came from community centers, summer youth programs, a program for economically disadvantaged youth, and HS/HT. Youth participants were involved in activities to explore careers, economic development, and personal finance. The afternoons were spent at site visits to technology-based industries (e.g., the Fraunhofer Center for Molecular Biotechnology, Hologic Direct Radiography, and WL Gore's GoreTex Plant) learning about a vast array of high-tech careers. This partnership has benefited both HS/HT and JA as they collaborated to meet common goals. JA wanted to serve more at-risk youth and HS/HT wanted to expand the access its students had to existing youth development programs and programs dealing with basic employability skills. In addition, the HS/HT coordinators were trained to use the JA curriculum, "Success Skills." Since both organizations are pleased with this evolving partnership, which is opening doors between students with disabilities and local businesses, their goal is to expand the program to two weeks.

Component 5: Connecting to Continuing Education Opportunities and the Workforce

Another important linkage HS/HT programs can assist with is connecting youth with postsecondary education and adult services workforce preparation programs. It is important, however, that the youth drive this process by being the primary decision makers concerning their own learning and future work endeavors. When youth carry this responsibility, they learn more about the range of their own strengths and abilities. This knowledge can then translate into a greater sense of confidence and personal adjustment, as well as academic and professional success.

Postsecondary Education

While Chapter 3 (Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning Experiences) emphasized educating HS/HT participants on available postsecondary options in the context of what they would need to pursue their career-related goals, this chapter emphasizes the importance of actually linking the youth to postsecondary institutions themselves, including career and technical training facilities, while they are still involved with HS/HT.

Upon leaving secondary school, the protections and services mandated by the IDEA no longer apply to the educational settings in which students with disabilities may find themselves. However, the protections of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act do apply to postsecondary education programs. Most community colleges and four-year colleges and universities have responded to the requirements of the ADA and Section 504 by establishing Offices of Disability Support Services (DSS or a similar name) to address the needs of students with disabilities. However, students with disabilities are not automatically referred to the DSS office.

Although DSS offices provide services free of charge, a student with a disability must initiate contact with the DSS office and establish eligibility for services prior to receiving accommodations and/or specialized services and supports while enrolled at the institution. This means a student must disclose his/her disability in order to receive services. If the student chooses not to disclose, accommodations will not be provided.

Although not standardized, the eligibility criteria used by DSS offices are primarily based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and ADA guidelines. Examples of eligibility criteria for disability-related support services include

- verification of diagnosis and severity of the disabling condition prepared by a qualified professional, and
- a detailed description of how this impairment significantly limits a major life activity in an educational setting.

Since each category of disability may require different documentation to prove eligibility, students should be instructed to contact the DSS office at the schools they are considering to get information on the school's specific documentation guidelines. For example, almost all postsecondary institutions require documentation of a learning disability or a mental health condition to have been verified within the last five years. However, this timeframe may vary from institution to institution.

Consider some of the following activities as ways to introduce HS/HT students to the range of postsecondary education options:

- contacting local community colleges and universities and inviting their admissions officer to talk with students about the school's admission requirements;
- discussing with the students different options for financing postsecondary education, including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), different types of scholarships, and possible assistance from Vocational Rehabilitation;
- conducting site visits to as many community colleges, colleges, and universities as possible;
- arranging for youth with disabilities to meet with Disability Support Service representatives from local colleges and universities;
- connecting the youth and the program to faculty interested in helping steer the participants into technology-based jobs and promising STEM careers;
- finding mentors from postsecondary institutions to work with HS/HT participants;

- developing a feeder program arrangement for postsecondary projects that are promoting careers in the STEM careers for youth with disabilities, such as those sponsored by the American Association of Advanced Sciences;
- negotiating the use of computer laboratories on campus for use by the HS/HT participants;
- arranging visits to college and trade fairs;
- assisting youth in identifying specific college and training programs related to their career interests and experiences;
- using college facilities for HS/HT summer programs; and
- writing letters of recommendation for youth to be used in college applications.

Maryland HS/HT has a local site located at the University of Maryland (UMD). The UMD site sponsors a summer program where HS/HT students stay on campus for three weeks. During this time the students experience campus life, become familiar with Disability Support Services, participate in campus social life and recreational activities, and take one course in a high tech area for three college credits. This program is followed by an internship where each student receives a stipend. The internship may or may not extend into the school year.

Online Resources to Consider

America’s Career Resource Network (ACRN) consists of state and federal organizations that provide information, resources and training on career and education exploration. ACRN provides useful information on financial aid resources for post-high school education. Visit <<http://www.acrnetwork.org/>>.

Financial Aid Center, sponsored by Career OneStop, has information on financial assistance for college students. It also has resources for workers who need training. Visit <<http://www.careeronestop.org/FINANCIAL/FinancialAidHome.asp>>.

U.S. Department of Education’s Federal Student Aid (FSA) Programs are the largest source of student aid in

America. They provide about 70 percent of all student financial aid. Visit <<http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/index.jsp>>.

Connecting to Workforce Preparation Programs

Students with disabilities may need assistance in securing services from adult service providers who administer workforce preparation programs. The most significant difference between receiving disability services in school and receiving services post-school is that school-based services are mandated through federal civil rights laws while adult services are not. It is important to prepare youth for the transition from entitlement to services prior to graduation from high school to eligibility-based services available through the adult services system. Accessing such services can be time consuming and difficult.

Connecting activities to help youth access adult services and workforce preparation programs might include:

- visiting a local One-Stop Career Center and helping youth identify existing job openings in the community (see Exhibit 5.2 for detailed information on the services available through One-Stop Career Centers and on how to locate the One-Stop Career Center nearest you);
- helping youth identify staff positions within companies that provide internships;
- helping youth develop lists of personal resources and references, such as workplace mentors and collaborating partner organizations;
- assisting students in developing resumes and completing job applications;
- arranging meetings with local VR Counselors to determine the young person’s eligibility for VR services prior to exiting high school (see Exhibit 5.3 for detailed information on the services and supports available through the VR program and on how to locate local VR offices); and
- identifying other community-based job placement resources that youth might access.

Component 6: Connecting to Other Programs and Opportunities

Connecting to Programs Available to All Youth

Young people enjoy being involved in recreational activities, participating in team sports, and becoming members of clubs. Youth with disabilities are no different; however, they may need assistance in making connections with programs available to all youth. Consequently, HS/HT coordinators should explore what is available in the community in terms of recreational activities, sports, clubs and other opportunities of interest and approach those programs about including HS/HT students. Several HS/HT programs have developed partnerships with groups like Junior Achievement, AmeriCorps, Job Corps, and Youth Leadership Forums. Some HS/HT sites have sponsored teams of students to enter in competitions where youth with disabilities have not previously participated.

Online Resources to Consider

Intelitek contains educational product lines such as Mechatronics and Automation, and covers subjects such as CAD, CAM, CNC, robotics, machine vision, FMS, CIM, hydraulics, pneumatics, PLC, sensors, and process control data acquisition. Intelitek offers blended e-learning solutions designed to prepare students for careers in technologically advanced business environments. Intelitek's products are used in FIRST®

FRC, robotics competitions. Visit <http://www.intelitek.com/default.asp>.

Connecting to Disability-Specific Programs

HS/HT students can also benefit from connections to disability-specific programs, services, and supports such as those available through Independent Living Centers (ILCs) and other consumer-driven, community-based support service agencies. In some places, HS/HT sites are housed in ILCs, to easily facilitate such connections. In other places, a visit to the local ILC or a presentation by staff from an ILC can facilitate such connections. To locate the ILC closest to you, visit <http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html>.

HS/HT students may also benefit from connections to Parent Training Centers, which are located in every state. These Centers provide training and information to parents of infants, toddlers, school-aged children, and young adults with all types of disabilities and the professionals who work with these families. This assistance helps parents participate more effectively with professionals in meeting the educational needs of their children and youth. The Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers (the Alliance) coordinates the delivery of technical assistance to the Parent Training Centers and the Community Parent Resource Centers through six regional centers located in New Jersey, North Carolina, Florida, Ohio, Colorado, and California. For more information, visit <http://www.taalliance.org/PTIs.htm>.

Florida HS/HT Students Receive First Challenge Award at FIRST VEX Robotics Competition

The Palm Bay High "Piratech" Robotics team participated in the Southeastern U.S. FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) VEX Midlevel Robotics Competition. HS/HT students made up half of the team. Palm Bay High School is currently the only school in Brevard County providing this new midlevel robotics program to students.

After completing their engineering design process, the Palm Bay High "Piratech" Engineering Team built their competition robot and took it to the Gwinett Center in Duluth, Georgia, for the competition. The students placed second for autonomous robotic control and third overall in elimination matches. After a successful and

grueling day of competition one of the robot's gears failed in the final alliance playoffs, rendering its manipulator useless, and placing the team in sixth place in that round. Nevertheless, the team was nominated for the FIRST Challenge Award, FIRST's most prestigious award, in recognition of their gracious professionalism in helping work on two other teams' robotic systems and computer controls which led those teams to first and second places. They were also recognized for their display of engineering design, problem-solving and teamworking abilities. As a result, the team was invited to participate in the FIRST National Competition.

HS/HT students receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits should be made aware of benefits-planning counseling services. SSI is a federal income supplement program designed to help individuals who are aged, blind, and/or disabled, who have little or no income. It provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. For more information on SSI, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/notices/supplemental-security-income/>.

Medicaid is a federally-funded, state-run program that provides medical assistance for individuals and families with limited incomes and resources. It pays for health care costs, including, among other things, doctor and dentist services, clinic and hospital services, home health care, family planning services, mental health care, prescription drug coverage, and optometrist services and eyeglasses. For more information on Medicaid, visit <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/home/medicaid.asp>.

Since eligibility for both SSI and Medicaid is based on being low income, determining the impact of employment on cash assistance and on access to specific services, such as personal attendant care, is an important consideration for some youth with disabilities as they plan for the future. You can find benefits planning information in a number of places. Federally-funded Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA), formally called the Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach (BPAO) programs, can be found throughout the country in a number of organizations. Visit <http://www.ssa.gov/work/WIPARFA.html>. The goal of the WIPA Program is to better enable SSA beneficiaries with disabilities to make informed choices about work. Many State VR agencies also have benefits planners on staff. A benefits planner can help

- explain what will happen to the benefits someone receives when they go to work;
- assist individuals in planning for work and greater independence;
- assist individuals in taking advantage of work incentives (such as Plans for Achieving Self-Support, known as PASS Plans) that will increase the amount of income available to them;
- tell individuals about programs that may allow them to keep necessary cash or health benefits when they go to work or school;
- explain notices received from Social Security that are often difficult to understand; and
- teach individuals how to report their earnings, if necessary, to Social Security.

Online Resources to Consider

To locate the WIPA Program in your state, visit <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/ServiceProviders/WIPADirectory.html>.

To learn more about PASS Plans, visit <http://www.rcep7.org/~ssawork/glossary/PASS.html>, or http://www.disabilitybenefits101.org/ca/programs/income_support/pass/faqs.htm.

Component 7: Assistive Technology

Assistive technology (AT) was referenced in Chapter 2, School-Based Preparatory Experiences, as it applies to universal design for learning and the need for AT while a young person is still in high school. Here, AT is examined as it applies to individualized accommodations that can ensure the meaningful participation of young adults in programs and activities within their communities.

Thousands of AT devices are available, ranging from very simple, low-cost or low-tech products—such as calculators or book holders—to high-tech solutions such as voice-activated speech synthesizers. In addition to helping students succeed in school, such devices allow youth with disabilities to maintain or improve their functional capabilities, become more independent, and pursue opportunities for postsecondary education and employment. AT devices are compensatory tools, not luxuries or a means to gain unfair advantage over others. Rather, AT helps to create a level playing field for youth with disabilities.

AT devices can be purchased off the shelf from the local computer or hardware store, or they can be designed especially for youth with disabilities and marketed through catalogues or speciality stores. In addition to

devices, the term “AT” also refers to related services such as assessments, training, maintenance, and repair of equipment and devices. AT assessments are used to identify what particular devices would help an individual with a disability based upon the evaluator’s opinion of the individual’s functional strengths and abilities, preferences, and the proposed usage. A proper AT assessment also addresses the related services needed to support use of the device. Assessments and other services are critical to the successful selection, acquisition, and use of appropriate AT.

You can identify what types of AT devices or services a young person will need as s/he participates in HS/HT activities by considering the following:

- Ask the youth what devices or services they have used in the past. What worked and what didn’t work?
- Review any vocational and/or AT assessments the student has had. If the student has not had an AT assessment, recommend that s/he include the need for an AT assessment in his/her Individualized Transition Plan, IEP, or 504 Plan.
- Interview parents and teachers to see how needs were successfully addressed at home and in school.
- Use the checklist in Exhibit 2.2 to get a clear understanding of the range of assistive technology devices, materials, and services that have been or can be used by a particular student. As you will see, this checklist can be used to explore a student’s need for reasonable accommodations in a variety of settings.
- Help the young person find needed assistive technology by searching for adaptive equipment on the Internet, making a referral to the Statewide Assistive Technology Project, and/or working with a community-based organization that specializes in assistive technology.

Commercial AT can significantly enhance the quality-of-life, independence, and employability of youth with disabilities. While a lot of AT is cheap and easy to obtain, some is relatively expensive and, as a result, many individuals can not afford it. While schools will often purchase the AT that a student needs to facilitate learning, most schools maintain ownership of the AT.

In some cases, students with disabilities are even precluded from taking the school’s AT home with them to complete homework assignments. In almost all cases, students who graduate from high school no longer have access to the AT that contributed to their success and independence while they were in school.

In Maryland, several localities have included a voluntary assistive technology (AT) addendum to their local transitioning agreements between the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and the local school systems. The purpose of the AT addendum is to document how DORS and the local school system will work collaboratively to assure that AT devices and services are provided to assist VR-eligible students with disabilities in transitioning from school to postsecondary education and employment. Since early intervention and identification are key, students in need of AT for their transition are to be identified to DORS during the fall of their next-to-last year of high school. School system staff are to coordinate with DORS to arrange for necessary AT assessments and allow for this to occur during school hours. Prior to purchase of any device, the school system will confer with DORS to ensure that both parties agree that the AT is appropriate for the student and, in the case of computer equipment, that it is compatible with school system information technology policies and can be used in school. Third party resources and DORS funds are used to purchase the equipment, the school system is to provide training on the use of the equipment, and DORS is to provide technical support for the equipment. The goal is for the student to receive AT equipment no later than November of their final year in school. The equipment is to be included in the student’s IEP or 504 plan, and in his/her Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) negotiated with DORS. The equipment will then go with the student when s/he leaves school. By beginning to use the equipment while still in school, the student can make any adjustments during the transition period and then be comfortable with it when s/he moves in to postsecondary education and, ultimately, employment.

Free AT is available to help to mitigate these situations. The Ohio HS/HT program has dedicated and maintains a portion of its website to include links to various sources of free AT. Access this valuable information at <<http://www.onlineconferencing.com/at.htm#top#top>>.

Online Resources to Consider

Job Accommodation Network (JAN) specializes in helping people find the accommodations needed to succeed in the workplace and maintains an extensive database for Internet searches. JAN staff are available to research various assistive technology solutions for callers. Visit <<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>>.

Statewide Assistive Technology Projects, authorized under the Assistive Technology Act, provide an array of AT services and have a range of AT equipment available for people to try. Many have AT loan or recycle programs. Visit <<http://www.resna.org/taproject/at/statecontacts.html>>.



Getting Organized

There are several organizational tasks HS/HT staff may wish to pursue when connecting youth with different types of support services.

- **Plan** an active role for HS/HT participants throughout ALL connecting activities (i.e., having students make phone calls to gather information, set up appointments, etc). This will increase each student's level of self-sufficiency for the future and promote the concepts of self-determination, informed choice, and self-advocacy.
- **Find out** what tutoring programs are available through the school system and in the community.
- **Poll students** to determine how many are participating in tutoring programs, have visited their local One-Stop Center, have contacted VR, have visited a college campus, etc.
- **Solicit** peer tutoring support from existing participants and from graduates of the program. Find out if any of these people have areas of academic "expertise" and are willing to work with other HS/HT students.
- **Coordinate** mentoring efforts locally by contacting other programs in the community.
- **Assure** that assistive technologies are provided to meet the individualized needs of each participant. If you feel a student may benefit from assistive technology but has not explored the issue, contact the Statewide Assistive Technology Project to set up an opportunity for the student to explore using different assistive technology devices.
- **Develop** a transportation plan for each participant (with their input), arranging for travel training, and, for orientation and mobility training if appropriate.
- **Obtain** information, including the eligibility criteria, on the youth, adult, and VR programs available through local workforce organizations.

Supporting Research: Connecting Activities

While a number of federal initiatives encourage cross-agency collaboration and service integration, research and practice show that effective cross-agency collaboration and service integration are difficult to implement. As a result, the literature has more references to impediments to collaboration than effective practices.

Fosler (2002) found a variety of cross-sector collaborations between government, business, and nonprofits ranging from ad hoc problem-solving to long-range and ongoing development of civic capacity. Components of effective collaboration included process and membership elements, but key among them was strong, facilitative leadership (Blank & Lombardi, 1991; Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Gray, 1991; Lashway, 1995; Lasker & Weiss, 2003). Chrislip & Larson (1994) noted that when collaboration is appropriate, it can provide a process for addressing shared challenges, build a deeper sense of shared responsibility for a collective future, and restore hope for creating, revitalizing, nurturing, and connecting effective communities.

The Service Integration Network (SINET) found that (a) defining and ensuring equitable treatment for disadvantaged families, (b) reducing tensions among institutional cultures, and (c) ensuring fiscal and programmatic accountability and assessing program performance, were requirements for effective cross-agency service integration (Corbett & Noyes, 2004, p. 28). Factors affecting integration of TANF and WIA employment services included legal issues and alignment of policies and procedures, but the greatest barriers to comprehensive family services were non-legal issues such as leadership, vision, resources, and information sharing (Greenberg & Noyes, 2004, p. 31). Research also suggests that barriers to service integration may include the collective beliefs of front-line staff, mutual mistrust, and a belief that staff members were powerless to change an ineffective system. “Managers will be able to accomplish better, more integrated service delivery only by understanding how to shape the deeper structures in human service organizations that determine or constrain action” (Sandfort, 2004, p. 35).

A significant structural barrier for people from diverse cultures is the lack of cultural competence found in most organizations. The National Council on Disability (NCD, 2003c) found that, “people with disabilities who are also from diverse cultures are significantly hampered in realizing outcomes of full participation in all aspects of society due to a host of barriers to the benefits of civil and human rights. A small but growing body of research on this issue indicates that barriers include the lack of culturally appropriate outreach, language and communication

barriers, attitudinal barriers, and the shortage of individuals from diverse cultures in the disability services profession.”

Organizational factors in schools are associated with better transition outcomes for youth with disabilities and include innovative, effective, and enduring partnerships among a variety of key stakeholders. The importance of stakeholder collaboration and systems linkages to support student achievement and post-school outcomes was recognized in early work on transition concepts and challenges (e.g., Halpern, 1985; Will, 1984), and it remains critically important still (e.g., Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999; Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002).

The report by the U.S. General Accounting Office (July 2003b, p. 3), *Special education: Federal action can assist states in improving postsecondary outcomes for youth*, identified a number of problems impeding youth transition to postsecondary education and employment, including poor linkages between schools and youth service providers, and a lack of community work experience while in high school. Although states developed action plans to increase services such as vocational training, and community work experience for youth with disabilities, other “non-educational” problems such as transportation were less likely to be addressed.

Frieden (2003) also found evidence of “a failure of secondary and postsecondary schools to establish paths of communication and concert their efforts.” The challenge to locate and advocate for services and accommodations can be quite frustrating as various systems feature limited resources, inconsistent terminology, disconnected agencies, inconsistent laws, and conflicting eligibility requirements (Whelley, Hart, and Zafft, 2002). Ultimately, without a successfully functioning transition program from secondary to postsecondary education, youth with disabilities find themselves burdened with additional disadvantages (Frieden, 2003).

Other research suggests that systems can work more effectively with schools in order to improve student achievement of meaningful secondary and post-school outcomes through: (a) the use of written and enforceable interagency agreements that structure the provision of collaborative transition services (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002); and (b) the provision of a secondary curriculum that prepares youth for success in work, postsecondary, and community living environments (Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999). Promising collaboration strategies have been proposed to link secondary education systems with employers and community employment services funded under WIA (Luecking, Crane, & Mooney, 2002;

EXHIBIT 5.1 (CONTINUED)

Mooney & Crane, 2002) and with postsecondary education systems (Flannery, Bigaj, Slovic, & Dalmau, 1999; Hart, Zimbrich, & Whelley, 2002; Stodden & Conway, 2003).

Research suggests that responsive and knowledgeable personnel can be developed and supported through: (a) the establishment of key positions funded jointly by schools and adult agencies to deliver direct services to students (Luecking & Certo, 2002); and (b) the development and delivery of interagency and cross-agency training opportunities (Furney, Hazasi, & DeStefano, 1997). Several studies called for new models of support provisions that are personally responsive, flexible, and individualized, as well as coordinated with instruction and integrated with the overall support needs of the student (Burgstahler, 2002; National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Supports, 2000b; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000; Stodden & Conway, 2003). Many students with disabilities in postsecondary education require case management assistance or the skills, knowledge, and time to manage their own services and supports (National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, 2000a; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000; Stodden, Jones, & Chang, 2002).

Lack of interagency collaboration and coordination has been found to impede access to necessary support services for youth with and without disabilities. These include

- legally required educational services to youth with disabilities in the juvenile justice system that are not being provided due to limited resources, inadequate record-keeping, and a lack of culturally appropriate disability-related services for the large number of racial/ethnic minorities in this population (NCD, 2003);
- youth with mental health needs housed in juvenile detention centers without adequate services due to a lack of available community residential treatments, inpatient psychiatric care, outpatient mental health care, and foster care services (Special Investigations Division, Committee of Government Reform, 2004);
- a lack of special education services for children who are homeless (Jackson, 2004);
- bureaucratic delays that could be reduced by improved service coordination through the formation of community partnerships that can integrate resources and offer informal approaches to meet the needs of children in foster care and the families that care for them (Vandivere, Chalk, & Moore, 2003, p. 6);
- a lack of supportive housing for homeless populations (Greiff, Proscio, & Wilkins, 2003) that include transitioning youth;

- “overlapping, fragmented, or confusing services among transportation programs that did not coordinate” (U.S. GAO, 2003a, p. 4); and
- confusion among youth and their families about similar and complementary transition services provided by VR, WIA, and Ticket-to-Work programs due to differing eligibility requirements; lack of expertise in serving youth with disabilities at workforce centers; waiting lists for VR services; concerns about losing public assistance; and lack of awareness that these federal resources exist (GAO, 2003b, pp. 4-5).

NCD (2003a, p. 53) observed that “interagency information-sharing appears likely to increase in coming years, and the general, and seemingly reasonable assumption appears to be that this sharing would result in beneficial outcomes. At the same time, the comments obscure the considerable complexity involved in the way both federal and states laws can determine what information can and cannot be shared within and among various agencies.”

Stodden, Dowrick, Gilmore, & Galloway (2001, pp. 20-21) note that the literature “lacked the voice of the student and their family members, a circumstance that is indicative of the pervasive deficit-based approach of providing service to those with disabilities as opposed to collaborating with such individuals and families, as experts of their own abilities, to create effective strength-based supports...Similarly, the literature rarely focused on the needs or perspectives of teachers who often feel they are victims of federal policy and research priority development.”

Luecking & Mooney (2002, p. 2) found that employers, who typically feel unprepared to adequately support the employment needs of individuals with disabilities, were also left out of the partnering equation although quality service from employment specialists was a contributing factor in the successful employment of youth with disabilities.



Making Connections to One-Stop Career Centers

This exhibit focuses on the services and supports available at One-Stop Career Centers through the programs authorized under Title I of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). Within the federally-funded One-Stop system, adult services are divided into three categories: (1) Core Services, (2) Intensive Services, and (3) Training Services.

Core Services are available to all adults 18 years of age and older, and include, but are not limited to

- determination of eligibility to receive additional services beyond the services defined as WIA core services;
- outreach, intake, and orientation to information on the array of services and training opportunities available through the workforce system;
- initial assessment of skill levels, aptitudes, and abilities, as well as an assessment of the need for any specialized or supportive services;
- job search and placement assistance, and where appropriate, career counseling;
- consumer information regarding the availability of supportive services (e.g., transportation services) in the local area and referrals to such services;
- information on how to apply for unemployment compensation claims;
- assistance in establishing eligibility for programs and services not funded under WIA;
- statistical employment information relating to local, regional, and national labor market areas, including job vacancy listings, information on the job skills required for these positions, and information relating to local occupations in demand, the skills required, and earnings potential;
- information on the performance and program cost of eligible providers of training services; and
- follow-up services, including workplace counseling for participants who meet certain eligibility requirements.

Although Core Services are generally viewed as “adult services,” many One-Stop Career Centers provide these same services to youth between the ages of 14 and 18.

Intensive Services are available to adults who are eligible for WIA adult services that have received at least one core service and are

- unemployed and have been unable to obtain employment through core services, and have been determined by the

One-Stop staff to be in need of more intensive services to obtain employment; or

- who are employed, but who are determined by One-Stop staff to be in need of intensive services in order to get or keep a job that allows them to become economically self-sufficient.

Intensive services include, but are not limited to

- comprehensive and specialized assessments of skill levels and service needs, which may include diagnostic testing;
- in depth evaluations to identify the barriers a participant might face in securing employment and to help identify the participant’s employment goals;
- development of an individual employment plan to identify appropriate objectives and the right combination of services to assist someone in achieving their employment goal(s);
- group counseling;
- individualized career planning;
- case management for participants seeking intensive and training services;
- short-term pre-vocational services including development of skills in learning, communications, interviewing, punctuality, personal hygiene and dress, and professional conduct to prepare the participant for unsubsidized employment or training;
- assistance in keeping a job and moving to a better position within a company after initial placement on the job; and
- supportive services such as childcare, transportation, and assistance with work- and training-related expenses.

Training Services for eligible individuals are provided through a type of voucher, referred to as an Individual Training Account (ITA), which allows participants to choose among eligible training providers pre-approved by Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs) through a competitive process based upon performance-related information. These accounts are equivalent to vouchers that can be used to secure services from any eligible training provider. At a minimum, a participant must receive at least one intensive service before receiving training services. A determination of the need for training services will be identified in the participant’s service plan, comprehensive assessment, or through other intensive services. Training services include

EXHIBIT 5.2 (CONTINUED)

- occupational skills training, including training for non-traditional employment;
- on-the-job training;
- programs that combine workplace training with related instruction, which may include cooperative education programs;
- training programs operated by the private sector;
- training to upgrade skills and retrain for a different job;
- education on how to establish and operate your own business;
- adult education and literacy activities provided in combination with other training services; and
- customized training conducted with a commitment by an employer or group of employers to employ individuals upon successful completion of the training.

Supportive Services may be provided under certain circumstances to enable an individual to participate in program activities and to secure and retain employment. Examples include assistance covering

- local transportation costs,
- childcare and dependent care costs,
- housing and food, and
- relocation and out-of-area job search expenses.

Retention Services (or Follow-Up Services) include services that are classified as post-employment or job retention services and include such things as supportive services, counseling, and certain kinds of training. These services are expected to assist an individual in maintaining and succeeding in a job, as well as assisting in increasing their salary and moving towards greater economic self-sufficiency.

WIA emphasizes that general employment and training services can meet the needs of people with disabilities. The legislation and regulations state specifically that One-Stop Career Centers are to be designed to serve all people, including people with disabilities.

WIA Youth Services

Youth with disabilities typically receive services under the youth funding stream in Title I of WIA. WIA youth services are available for youth ages 14 to 21. Eligibility is based on being low-income and one or more of the following:

- deficient in basic literacy skills;
- a school dropout, homeless, a runaway, or a foster child;
- pregnant or a parent;
- an offender; and/or
- an individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment.

Even if the family of a youth with a disability does not meet the income eligibility criteria, the youth may be considered a “family of one” if the youth’s own income meets the income criteria. In addition, up to five percent of the youth served in a local area can be exempted from the low-income requirement, if they meet certain criteria.

Youth activities are available to youth who are in-school as well as youth who are not. WIA requires that 30 percent of youth funds be used to address the needs of out-of-school youth. The WIA definition of “out-of-school” includes youth who have dropped out of school, as well as youth who have graduated from high school or hold a GED but are deficient in basic skills, unemployed, or underemployed. To be defined as “out-of-school,” the young person must not be enrolled in school or any alternative educational program when s/he registers for WIA services; however, the young person may be placed in an educational program, such as a GED program or alternative school, as part of the service strategy after registration.

Youth services are available through One-Stop Career Centers, but are frequently delivered throughout local communities by eligible youth service providers chosen by LWIB through a competitive process.

Online Resources to Consider

America’s Service Locator can be used to find the One-Stop Career Center nearest you. Visit <<http://www.servicelocator.org>>.

DisabilityInfo.gov is the federal government’s one-stop website for information of interest to people with disabilities, their families, employers, service providers, and many others. It provides information regarding services for people with disabilities, including One-Stop Career Centers. Visit <<http://www.disabilityinfo.gov>>.

The U.S. Workforce Website contains information about WIA and can be used to locate the One-Stop Career Center nearest you. Visit <<http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/training/onestop.htm>>.

Making the Connection to Vocational Rehabilitation

State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies (VR) have a wealth of resources related to employment options for individuals with disabilities. VR assists individuals with disabilities who are experiencing barriers to employment. The intended outcome of the receipt of VR services is the attainment of employment that is consistent with the individual's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

Although anyone who has a disability can apply for VR services, to be eligible for VR services a person must

- be an individual with a physical or mental impairment that makes it difficult to get or keep a job;
- expect to get or keep a job as a result of the services and supports received from VR; and
- require VR services to prepare for or engage in employment that is consistent with his/her abilities, capabilities, and interests.

Thus, to establish eligibility for VR services, a person must provide information about his/her disability, any barriers to employment resulting from the disability, and information demonstrating the ability to benefit from VR services. VR must also collect documentation that proves the person can legally work in the U.S. Individuals who are receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are automatically eligible for VR services as long as they are pursuing employment. However, these individuals must still go through the process of applying for services.

Similar to special education services, VR services are individualized based on the needs of eligible individuals. Once a person has been determined eligible, a VR counselor will assist that person in identifying appropriate vocational goals and in identifying the services and supports needed to achieve those goals. Individuals applying for VR services may be asked to participate in formal evaluations or assessments to identify their strengths, abilities, capabilities, and interests as they apply to employment.

Once a person has completed these assessments, a VR counselor will work with him/her to identify one or two career choices that are in keeping with the assessment results. The counselor should also provide the person with information on the array of services VR has to assist individuals in pursuing employment goals. This type of information is extremely important for VR consumers to exercise their right to informed choice throughout the VR process.

The Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)

An IPE is a written agreement between the eligible individual and the VR agency. The IPE describes an eligible individual's vocational goals, lists the services and supports that will be needed to accomplish those goals, explains how those services and supports will be provided or purchased, and identifies the providers of those services.

The services and supports that an individual may receive from VR may include

- evaluations and assessments to determine the extent of the individual's disability and the types of services and supports s/he will need to pursue competitive employment and to overcome functional limitations resulting from the disability;



- vocational evaluation, counseling, and guidance services to explore the individual’s interests, skills, abilities, potential, and limitations;
- work adjustment training to help the individual understand his/her vocational needs and abilities, and to identify the types of jobs and careers that s/he is likely to handle successfully;
- job-related services (job search and placement assistance, job retention services, follow-up, and follow-along services);
- specialized support services such as interpreters, note-takers, transcription services, TTYs, Braille, and large print materials, when such things are needed to communicate with the individual’s counselor, participate in a training program, or engage in work;
- vocational training and other types of training, including assistance in pursuing a college education;
- assistive technology devices and services;
- transportation services;
- supported employment services;
- assistance in setting up a small business;
- independent living skills training that supports an employment goal; and
- transition services.

Transition Planning with VR Involvement

The following definition of “transition services” applies to the VR program and outlines the scope of services that a VR agency may provide to transition-age youth who have been determined eligible for services.

Transition services are defined as, “a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student’s needs, taking into account the student’s preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation” [29 USC 705(37)].

As clearly indicated in this definition, Congress intended that VR agencies be involved in transition planning for special education students. For a variety of reasons, the way VR approaches transition services varies significantly from state to state. Thus, VR’s involvement in transition planning may range from getting to know a young person in order to provide transition services at a later date, to actually providing services while the youth is still in school. If a youth with a disability is still in school and is not involved with VR, the youth may want to consider applying for services or talking to his/her teacher or guidance counselor about involving a VR counselor in his/her transition planning.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is required to include a transition component, referred to as the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP), for special education students beginning at age 16. It makes sense to include a VR counselor in the development of the IEP whenever employment issues are being addressed. VR counselors have a great deal of expertise in addressing barriers to employment resulting from disabilities. They are also familiar with different types of vocational and functional assessments that can help a young person identify his/her strengths, abilities, skills, functional limitations, and vocational interests. In addition, VR counselors should be familiar with the programs and services in the local community available to assist youth in overcoming barriers to employment and in finding and keeping a job. Based on differences in VR agencies, counselors in some states will join students’ transition teams and attend ITP meetings two or three years before a special education student leaves high school. In other states, counselors are not likely to get involved in ITP meetings until students have started their senior year of high school.

There Are No Guarantees

Although VR agencies are funded by the federal government, they are operated by the states and have lots of flexibility in how they use their federal funds to meet the employment and training needs of individuals with disabilities. For example, some VR agencies will assist an eligible youth with the costs of college without looking at the income and resources available to the youth’s family. Others will look at the income and resources of the youth’s family prior to providing financial assistance for college. In a state that looks at the person’s family’s income and resources, the person may be asked to pay for part or all of his/her college expenses depending on the family’s financial situation.

EXHIBIT 5.3 (CONTINUED)

Since most VR agencies do not have the resources to serve everyone who could potentially benefit from services, the length of time that a person has to wait to actually receive services may be determined by an “Order of Selection” (OOS). An OOS is a system of prioritization that requires the VR agency to serve eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities first, when the agency’s resources are not adequate to serve all who might be eligible for assistance. Thus, even if a person is determined eligible for VR services, s/he may have to wait for some time before receiving assistance if s/he lives in a state where VR is under an OOS.

Getting Help Using VR

A VR consumer has the right to appeal any negative decisions affecting his/her eligibility for and access to VR services whether s/he is applying for services, or has been determined eligible and is receiving services. A negative decision is, for instance, a finding that a person is not eligible for VR services, a decision that an eligible individual will not receive a specific service that the individual believes s/he needs to achieve his/her vocational goals, or the termination of services that an eligible person is already receiving. VR has both formal and informal processes for appealing such decisions. VR counselors

are required to provide VR applicants and consumers with information on these processes. If a consumer has gone through the informal mediation process offered by the state VR agency and is not happy with the outcome, s/he has the right to go through a formal appeals process.

Anyone who feels they need assistance in pursuing either the informal mediation process or the formal appeals process may request assistance from the state’s Client Assistance Program (CAP). CAP receives money from the federal government to assist VR applicants and consumers when they disagree with something VR has done in connection with their requests for assistance. VR is required to provide information on how to contact CAP when a person applies for services and when s/he signs an IPE.

Online Resources to Consider

To locate the VR office nearest you, visit <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/SBSES/VOCREHAB.HTM>, or <http://www.rehabnetwork.org>.

To obtain contact information for the CAP in your state, visit http://www.ndrn.org/aboutus/PA_CAP.htm.

