

PAVING THE WAY TO WORK

A Guide to Career-Focused Mentoring for Youth with Disabilities



National Collaborative on
Workforce & Disability for Youth
Institute for Educational Leadership



The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) is composed of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, and workforce development issues.

NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, D.C. The Collaborative is charged with assisting state and local workforce development systems to integrate youth with disabilities into their service strategies.

Information on the Collaborative can be found at <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/>.

Information about the Office of Disability Employment Policy can be found at <http://www.dol.gov/odep/>.

Information is also available at <http://www.disabilityinfo.gov/>, the comprehensive federal website of disability-related government resources.



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Acknowledgements

The creation of the Mentoring Guide is rooted in the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy's (ODEP) charge to find and promote the most effective research-based policies and practices to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. Mentoring is recognized as one of the most important strategies for assisting youth in making a positive transition into adulthood. Both caring adults and peers may play a key role in mentoring. In response to the under-representation of youth with disabilities in most youth development programs, ODEP, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Labor's Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, launched an initiative to promote mentoring for youth with disabilities in 2004.

ODEP turned to the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) to provide technical assistance to the grantees supported through the initiative. NCWD/Youth immediately recognized that there were experienced, outstanding organizations that operate, support, and promote mentoring services throughout the country. The work of these organizations provides the underpinnings of this Guide. NCWD/Youth would be remiss not to acknowledge the outstanding work of the Northwest Regional Laboratory's National Mentoring Center, the National Mentoring Partnership, and Public/Private Ventures.

The Guide aims to add value to mentoring initiatives by providing specific disability-related and career preparation information relevant to mentoring. As you use this Guide, the reasons for these two choices will become clear.

The team of writers for this Guide was drawn from the NCWD/Youth partners. Joe Timmons from the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition at the University of Minnesota generated a large portion of this Guide. His colleague, Mary Mack, provided experience based upon the development of one of the few disability-specific mentoring programs, Connecting to Success, and the evaluation chapter. The Institute for Educational Leadership's Anthony Sims,

Ph.D, provided the developmental lens; Rebecca Hare contributed to the research, the youth voice, and the packaging of the document; and Joan Wills provided oversight for the project and on occasion provided some text.



Preface

WHY THIS GUIDE WAS DEVELOPED

Mentoring is a trusting relationship, formalized into a program of structured activities, which brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee. Across the country, youth mentoring continues to garner praise and expand as a way to assist youth in navigating the sometimes difficult transition to adulthood. Indeed, what began as a simple innovative idea without a supporting research base has evolved into a thriving, multi-faceted youth strategy with an impressive body of evidence-based data, standards of practice, and program evaluation guidelines.

Yet, the picture for mentoring is incomplete. Despite all of the information available on mentoring, there is very little about mentoring youth with disabilities or about career-focused mentoring of older youth. This Guide was developed specifically to address the needs of youth with disabilities during their transition from school to work. In this Guide, “transition” is defined as the period of time that begins when a young person starts planning the move from secondary school to postsecondary school, vocational training, or the work world. Youth aged 14 to as high as 24 (depending on individual factors and program definitions) can be considered “in transition.” The Guide offers a menu of choices for structuring mentoring services in an array of settings and provides a range of possible activities to be pursued by mentors and mentees. No one mentoring connection or any single mentoring program would be expected to cover the full range of options provided in this Guide, but the authors have chosen to be inclusive in listing resources, connections, and service strategies in order to be helpful to a wide array of organizations.

Many youth who participate in mentoring programs are considered vulnerable. The category of vulnerable youth is broad and includes multiple sub-categories of youth, such as those in foster care; those who are homeless, adjudicated, impoverished, or involved with drugs; those who have poor academic performance;

and those with a range of disabilities, including mental health needs. One of the largest cross-segments of this population of vulnerable youth, and a principal focus for this Guide, is youth with disabilities. Although many of the youth identified as vulnerable share common issues and challenges with their non-disabled peers, there are important distinctions between the groups that affect mentoring program design and the types of supports that youth with disabilities need.

The Guide focuses on issues relevant to mentoring older youth who are transitioning into adulthood. More specifically, the Guide identifies the *Guideposts for Success* for successful transition experiences for all youth within this age group, as well as additional considerations relevant to youth with disabilities.

This Guide

- emphasizes the role of mentoring in career preparation for all youth, including youth with disabilities.
- explores how mentoring activities can support positive youth development outcomes of older youth with disabilities.
- provides background information related to understanding and working with persons with disabilities.
- provides practical information on particular types of mentoring and on how to ensure that mentoring programs and services effectively meet the needs of youth with disabilities.
- identifies resources and tools that support mentoring for career preparation and that provide support to youth with disabilities.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This Guide is intended to serve as a primary resource for individuals designing mentoring programs for youth, including youth with disabilities, in the transition phase to adulthood. The motive for developing this tool was to provide a resource for the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability

Employment Policy's (ODEP's) faith- and community-based mentoring grantees, as well as similar projects, as they begin to think about how practice, research, and policy work together to make stronger, more successful youth mentoring programs that meet the needs of all youth. In addition to being a key audience, these grantees also served as a resource for materials included in this Guide. This Guide provides detailed information on how mentoring programs can support youth in achieving developmental competencies. In addition, it explains how mentoring can assist youth in achieving positive transition outcomes through activities consistent with a contextual framework called the *Guideposts for Success*. NCWD/Youth has identified these *Guideposts for Success* based on what research tells us that all youth need to transition to adulthood successfully. These *Guideposts* provide a statement of principles, a direction that will lead to better outcomes for all young people, and a way to organize policy and practice. This Guide concentrates primarily on career-focused mentoring that may be adapted for any program's specific needs. The appendices of this Guide contain information about state-driven mentoring programs and contact information for national disability organizations that have state and local affiliates. The Guide contains four tables (I, II, V, and VI), which build upon each other. These tables provide the reader with important knowledge about career awareness and youth development principles as well as related activities that mentoring programs can initiate to assist youth in achieving competencies associated with these principles. To help the reader identify the new information presented in these tables, each new section is highlighted.

The information and resources contained in this Guide are based on current knowledge in the field of mentoring. The authors recognize that mentoring practice and research are rapidly evolving, and that new standards of practice are constantly being developed to improve mentoring programs and services. In most cases, a summary of the available research for each chapter has been placed in the back of the relevant chapter as the first exhibit.

- **Chapter 1 – An Overview of Career Focused Mentoring Programs** introduces the concept of mentoring, shares relevant findings of what youth need to succeed in the workplace, and provides information about types of mentoring.
- **Chapter 2 – A Developmental Context and the Role of Mentoring** identifies developmental issues related to adolescence and young adulthood and explains how mentoring can assist older youth in achieving the developmental competencies of **learning, connecting, working, thriving, and leading**.
- **Chapter 3 – The Disabilities Context** provides an overview of information that mentoring programs need in order to serve youth with disabilities effectively, including disability awareness and disability etiquette, categories of disabilities, relevant legal guidance, and issues related to access and accessibility.
- **Chapter 4 – Mentoring Settings and Approaches** provides information about program settings, types of mentoring models, and ways to include career preparation in the models.
- **Chapter 5 – Operating Mentoring Programs** provides an overview of the nuts and bolts of operating a mentoring program, including resources and strategies to promote the inclusion of youth with disabilities, and a focus on career preparation.
- **Chapter 6 – Useful Program Evaluation** provides an overview of evaluating youth-mentoring programs that focus on career preparation.
- **Chapter 7 – Marketing** provides a discussion of how to market mentoring programs to a variety of audiences.

The Guide includes sample materials, references, and resources, including links to electronic or web-based resources. Many of the examples have been drawn from the ODEP-funded mentoring grant projects.