



ShortCuts

QUICK TAKES ON TOOLS YOU CAN USE



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Navigating Tunnels and Cliffs: Empowering Families and Caregivers to Assist Youth with Mental Health Needs in Preparing for Work

Challenges Facing Families and Caregivers:

Research shows that good mental health intervention strategies emphasize work as part of recovery. Unfortunately, however, for families and caregivers of many youth with mental health needs, career preparation and exploration are not top priorities. Rather their time is frequently spent as “case managers,” struggling with navigating a fragmented mental health service delivery system, while trying to manage day to day pressures. In addition, families and caregivers often have to fight for service coordination amidst inconsistent methods of disability identification that have the potential of leaving the youth without access to services because the youth may be considered as having mental health needs in school settings, but not qualified to receive services under the eligibility criteria used in the adult system.

Youth, families and caregivers should know that they don't have to go at it alone when it comes to helping a young person with a disability prepare for the workforce. The following resources are available to youth with mental health needs and their families and caregivers to help the young person prepare for a career and community life.

Promising Practices

- **PACER Center's Project C3 (Connecting Youth to Communities and Careers), Minneapolis, MN**
<http://www.c3online.org>
Project C3 is an innovative partnership between PACER Center and Minnesota state agencies serving youth. The goal of the project is to improve employment and postsecondary outcomes for youth, including youth with disabilities. Project C3 facilitates communication and collaboration between key partners so service coordination can be improved. The project utilizes an interactive cutting edge web-based resource mapping system that allows parents, youth, and professionals to find local services, and helps communities with strategic planning around youth activities.
- **Wraparound Milwaukee**
<http://www.co.milwaukee.wi.us/WraparoundMilwaukee7851.htm>
Wraparound Milwaukee is a unique type of managed care program operated by the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division that is designed to provide comprehensive, individualized and cost effective care to children with complex mental health and emotional needs. The project contracts with approximately 200 community service vendors to provide care coordination, crisis intervention, family advocacy, and employment programming. Wraparound Milwaukee is one of only four projects nationwide identified by the President's New Freedom Commission (2004) as being exemplary.



- **Statewide Family Networks**

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/childrenscampaign/statewide.asp>

The purpose of the Family Network and Support Program is to provide families of children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances (SED) the support and assistance needed to contribute to the development of effective Statewide Family Networks. Several of the projects sites in the Statewide Family Network Program specifically focus on the needs of ethnic minorities and rural families' issues.

What You Can Do: An Action Plan

Youth, parents, family members, caregivers, and other professionals providing support to youth with mental health needs (including but not limited to educators, professionals in the faith-based community, social workers, mentors, peer advocates, and medical professionals), must make coordination and collaboration of mental health services and career preparation a priority. Here are some things that parents and caretakers can do to jump start this process:

- Ensure that your youth's Individualized Education Program (IEP) includes goals that help the student understand his/her mental health disability and activities that help develop self-management and awareness of accommodations needed in the job setting.
- Familiarize yourself with your state's mental health service structure. Each state has its own mental health policies and programming.
- Know how to access funding for assessments, evaluations, and programming. Sources of this funding may include private or public insurance, workforce development agencies (such as Vocational Rehabilitation) or county level programs. Remember knowledge is power.
- Advocate for Individualized Mental Health Plans that include medication management, behavioral regulation strategies, cross-agency collaboration, work readiness training and on-the-job supports.
- Share your knowledge, experience and expertise. Youth, their families, and caregivers are valuable partners who have the capacity to inform and influence federal, state, and local mental health system policies, including the creation of workforce programs that address the unique issues of youth with mental health needs.
- Stress employment for youth with mental health needs as an important value, and ensure that the youth has multiple opportunities for career exploration and work-based experiences. Keep in mind that employment is an important aspect of mental health recovery and positive mental health maintenance, as well as a key component of life-long self-sufficiency.
- Create opportunities for your youth with mental health needs to develop leadership skills that allow him or her to direct programming decisions and inform mental health policy.



More Information on Best Practices

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

<http://www.ffcmh.org>

Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

<http://www.bazelon.org>

Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice

<http://cecp.air.org/default.asp>

PACER Center

<http://www.pacer.org/>

Tunnels and Cliffs: A Guide for Workforce Development Practitioners and Policymakers serving Youth with Mental Health Needs

http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources & Publications/mental_health.html

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