



Building an Infrastructure to Serve Youth

The Challenge:

Youth services vary extensively across states and communities. Services may be provided by community-based organizations, publicly and privately funded education and training providers, employer groups, professionals in private practice, and others. Publicly funded organizations, both state and local, must navigate a complex maze of laws, regulations, and policies in order to make decisions about their services. Funding concerns, lack of knowledge about available resources, variations in local philosophy and priorities, privacy protections, and reporting and evaluation requirements further complicate the picture.

Proposed Solution:

A cross-agency infrastructure can expand and bring greater efficiency to youth services in a state or locality. Collaborative, cross-agency cooperation can maximize available expertise and leverage funding for youth service delivery. The cross-agency structure may focus on comprehensive youth services or on priority areas of need such as vocational assessment or mental health services.

Promising Practices

- **Pennsylvania Interagency Committee to Coordinate Services Provided to Individuals with Disabilities**

<http://www.pabulletin.com/secure/data/vol28/28-37/1483.html>

Oversees the shift from isolated, single-agency activities to cross-system efforts among four state departments in the areas of policy and regulation, strategic planning, service delivery, data collection, program initiatives, and professional development.

- **Child Welfare Systems of Care**

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/service/soc/>

Information on the systems of care approach, guiding principles, local implementation, and federal grantees' lessons learned.

- **Eastern Washington Agriculture and Food Processing Partnership**

<http://www.co.yakima.wa.us/e&t/t-agfood.htm>

Award-winning partnership of state agencies, organized labor, Workforce Development Councils, community colleges, the U.S. Department of Labor, community-based organizations, training providers, and employers focused on closing a regional skills gap.

Who needs to act?

Policymakers, youth service providers, youth service practitioners, educators, community members, parents, youth and others who see the need for better and more effective services for youth.

Action Plan

- Form a planning team of interested parties, including youth and their families, from key organizations and agencies to provide momentum and continuity for creating a cross-agency infrastructure.
- Identify the general area(s) of need, e.g., coordinating and expanding youth services across the board or meeting a specific youth service need such as career assessment.
- Map out resources that exist in and around your community/environment. Begin the resource mapping process by identifying service agencies/providers and their missions, funders, services provided, youth populations served,



potential resources, and other pertinent information that would help you determine how best to work with them.

- Compile data in a format that will allow easy analysis, such as a database or spreadsheet.
- Map service gaps and overlaps, as well as expertise, assets, and resources.
- Analyze the data by considering major gaps and overlaps in services, barriers to aligning services, parameters for measuring success, etc.
- Begin identifying areas in which policy change will be needed, such as youth leadership, universal access, resource management, cultural and linguistic competence, professional development of staff and administrators, interagency data-sharing, etc.
- Develop a strategic plan to prioritize needs, develop goals and objectives, gain buy-in and support from key agencies and service providers, and evaluate progress.
- Partner with agencies and service providers to align services and develop understandings or agreements between agencies and organizations.
- Consider engaging or creating an intermediary organization that can serve as a trusted, objective partner to guide the systems change process.
- Share successes and lesson learned with local, state, and national stakeholders.

More Information

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Podmostko, M. (In press). *Tunnels and cliffs: A Guide for workforce development professionals and policymakers serving youth with mental health needs*. Washington, DC: National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, Institute for Educational Leadership.

Hart, D., Zimbrich, K, & Whelley, T. (2002, December). *Challenges in coordinating and managing services and supports in secondary and postsecondary options*. (NCSET Issue Brief.). Minneapolis, MN: National Center for Secondary Education and Transition, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. Available at <http://www.ncset.org/publications/printresource.asp?id=719>

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This document was developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, funded by a grant/contract/cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (Number #E-9-4-I-0070). The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Labor. Nor does mention of tradenames, commercial products, or organizations imply the endorsement by the U.S. Department of Labor.

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