



Improving Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities Post High School

According to the PA State Data Center (17-18), among total enrollment of 1.7 million children there are 290,986 (16%) identified in special education. Transition planning begins as early as 14 - when the transition team must identify goals to include post-secondary education, vocational training, employment, independent living and/or community participation.

AHEDD is a specialized human resource organization with a mission to serve the community as a catalyst in the employment and development of people with disabilities. As such, AHEDD has a long history of commitment to serving school youth, in collaboration with schools, government agencies and foundations. Our focus is on exploring career options and assessments as well as summer job placements. In addition, AHEDD has Coordinators with expertise in the area of working while receiving benefits through the Social Security Administration (SSA) which can be essential to effective career planning.

To evaluate the effectiveness of our work with youth, in 2016 AHEDD surveyed 365 former participants who graduated from high school up to two (2) years prior *and* who had received the agency's services prior to graduation. Of the 365 surveyed, 70 people (19%) responded. Below is what we learned and promote as ***Recommended Best Practices***:

- ***A focus on work experiences while still in school***; 87% of those who answered this question had multiple experiences of volunteer internships and paid employment.
- ***A high level of involvement with OVR***; 77% of those who answered this question responded "yes" to engagement with OVR. For example, OVR's Early Reach and Pre-employment Transition Service programs are helping youth with disabilities to prepare for their future transition into work.
- ***Access to Work Incentive Counseling (WIC)***; 53% of those who responded have already been receiving disability benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA). WIC is a recognized best practice to support employment by providing insight and guidance as to how current and future employment impacts SSA and other government benefits. This service is essential for parents of transition aged youth who receive SSA benefits.
- ***Collaboration and goal planning***; 91% of those who responded indicated they had an employment goal after high school. "Effective transition involves purposeful planning among varying entities. It entails recognizing the student's current strengths, interests, preferences, and needs, and then identifying what services and supports he or she will need to achieve future success" (PATTAN, Secondary Transition).