Career Development Programming Strategies for Transitioning Incarcerated Adolescents to the World of Work

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Abstract
Formerly incarcerated adolescents with disabilities face additional barriers to a successful transition to adulthood when released from the youth correctional facility often with societal expectations of transitioning directly to adulthood. Employment and post-secondary enrollment may serve as protective factors and reduce the likelihood of future crimes by the individual. This article provides an example of a facility-to-community transition project, Project SUPPORT, targeting incarcerated adolescents with either a special education or mental health disorder. The service delivery model along with the phases of services is described. Specifically, this article targets career development strategies for use by the transition specialist, a primary component of the service delivery model. Strategies described include: (a) the role of a Transition Specialist in job development and the service delivery model, (b) youth-focused planning and job matching, and (c) job recruitment strategies.

Societal expectations of all youth when they approach adulthood include the ability to: (a) live independently, (b) establish a career path, (c) obtain and maintain competitive employment and/or continuing education, and (d) participate in healthy social relationships and leisure activities (Halpern, 1985; Lehman, Clark, Bullis, Rinkin, & Castellanos, 2002). Work is viewed as a central responsibility and a benchmark for an adult in our society (Quintanilla, 1990). Work provides individuals with benefits in terms of money, self-direction and fulfillment, life-structure, and "position" within our culture. This societal expectation is fundamental to the way an individual – as well as others – view themselves (Osipow, 1983, Quintanilla, 1990). In the current global economy, fewer choices will be available to those not prepared for meeting the demands of the changing workplace.
Unprepared individuals will be more likely to earn less and experience a greater decline in their standard of living (Szymanski & Parker, 2003).

Juvenile offenders with some type of disabling condition are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system and are even more vulnerable to poor employment and life outcomes than their non-disabled peers (Wolford, 2000). Youth with disabilities in the juvenile justice system often are overlooked in the development, evaluation, and implementation of transition policies and programs (Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller, & Havel, 2002). Moreover, the transition outcomes for formerly incarcerated youth are abysmally compared to peers with and without disabilities (Bullis, Yovanoff, & Havel, 2004) and, longitudinal studies suggest that many youth displaying criminal behavior will manifest continuing problems— at least to some degree—in their work, school, and family endeavors as adults (e.g., McCord, 1992; Wolfgang, Thornberry, & Figlio, 1987). Youth with disabilities comprise 40% to 70% of all incarcerated youth compared to 10% to 12% of youth in the general population (Wolford, 2000). Currently, almost 135,000 youth are incarcerated in juvenile correctional facilities at any point in time (Sickmund, 2004), a figure which does not include young offenders held in adult prisons. The Transition Research on Adjudicated Adolescents Returning to Community Settings study (TRACS), a 5-year longitudinal study of 531 incarcerated youth examined transition outcomes after leaving Oregon's juvenile correctional facilities and returning to communities on parole, highlights outcomes for formerly incarcerated juvenile offenders (Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller & Havel, 2002). This sample did not receive any intervention services other than typical parole services.

- In this sample, almost 60% of the youth returned to the juvenile justice system or were committed to the adult correctional system;
- Only 25% enrolled in school after exiting custody, and fewer earned any form of high school completion document; and employment rates averaged less than 30%.
- Those participants with a special education disability, about 58% of the total sample, were 3 times more likely than those without a disability to return to the correctional system and 2 times less likely to become involved in work or school after incarceration.
- Formerly incarcerated youth with disabilities who were working or going to school during the first 6 months of release were 3.2 times less likely to return to custody and 2.5 times more likely to remain working or enrolled in school 12 months after exiting the correctional facility.
Findings from this research indicated that youth who become engaged in work and/or school fared better in their transition than those who did not become engaged. Therefore, employment and further education may serve as protective factors to reduce recidivism and improve post-school outcomes in the lives of formerly incarcerated adolescents with disabilities.

Adjudicated youth face numerous difficulties and unique challenges as they mature from adolescence into young adulthood, compared with their peers not involved in the juvenile justice system. Adolescents leaving closed custody youth correctional facilities in Oregon reported a host of interconnected supports and barriers present in their lives when returning to the community from incarceration (Unruh, Povenmire-Kirk, & Yamamoto, submitted). For example, youth reported the family and peers can serve as either a positive or negative role in the lives of these individuals depending on the level of support or negative influences related to each. Additionally, youth reported that negative peer influence is often linked to access to drugs and other criminal activity (Unruh, et al, submitted).

Accordingly, juvenile offenders with disabilities are a population with an incredibly high-cost to our society in terms of court, victim losses, incarceration costs, and reduced productivity from these adolescents. By altering the juvenile offender’s typical transition trajectory, these costs to society can be reduced. In Oregon it costs roughly $66,000/year to incarcerate a youth. If effective services are provided in the facility that can reduce re-incarceration rates and increase employment rates once released, then societal costs to the community and individual would be lessened. Positive long-term outcomes achieved by these youth can reduce recidivism rates and societal costs to taxpayers, the community, and future victims. The issue facing the correctional and educational fields, then, is one of developing evidence-based procedures and tools to improve the facility-to-community transition of these adolescents.

Transition services for incarcerated youth returning to the community must link the correctional facility and school, employment, family, and independent living in the community – service coordination that is seldom implemented (Rutherford, Griller, & Anderson, 2001; Leone, Meisel, Drakeford, 2002). Despite the fact that formerly incarcerated youth face numerous difficulties and unique challenges as they mature into young adulthood, few receive any sort of coordinated services that include any educational services, employment supports, and community-based social services (specifically mental health and drug abuse treatment) that needed by this hard-to-serve population.
Being employed is one benchmark measuring the successful transition into adulthood. Luecking, Fabian and Tilson (2004) define several barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities that include: (a) the misinformed attitudes about persons with disabilities, and (b) the lack of access to appropriate rehabilitation/training and employment search services. Young adult juvenile offenders may face the stigma of involvement in the juvenile justice system as an additional challenge. Across the years, job development strategies to support individuals with disabilities have evolved from focusing the employer on the individual’s deficits and encouraging the rewards of supporting employment for these individuals to a philosophy of matching the individual’s strengths to the right type of work environment and tasks. For example, individuals with disabilities—as well as those without—determine job or career selection based on the interaction between their skill set and the work environment (Szymanski, Hershenson, Enright, & Ettinger, 1996). Essential to the development of a long-term employment plan for a youth, it is critical to ensure that the individuals’ strengths, interests, and needs are considered when defining an appropriate career match.

Motivated by the TRACS findings, three Oregon state agencies: (a) the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA), Oregon’s juvenile justice agency; (b) Oregon Department of Education (ODE), and (c) Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Services, along with staff from the University of Oregon (UO) worked to develop a statewide transition program for juvenile offenders with disabilities leaving the juvenile correctional system and returning to the community. Services were initiated in 1999 with 4 pilot sites and the project was strategically expanded to a statewide model in which 9 service regions were established and operated through June of 2004.

Project Service Utilization Promoting Positive Outcomes for Rehabilitation & Transition for Incarcerated Youth (SUPPORT) participants have demonstrated positive results. At two, four, and six months after release from a youth correctional facility, approximately 68% of all participants were positively engaged in school and/or employment and did NOT return to youth or adult corrections (Unruh, 2005). This demonstrates a much higher rate of engagement than from the TRACS sample which demonstrated an engagement rate of 35% by juvenile offenders not receiving these specialized services (Bullis, et al., 2002). The recidivism data on Project SUPPORT participants provides important data regarding rates of recidivism for this high risk population and also provides guidance for service provision. First, the recidivism rates demonstrated by the sample receiving the Project SUPPORT intervention...
Indicates a lower rate of recidivism than compared with the TRACS sample. The TRACS sample consisted of all youth leaving the correctional facility and almost 30% returned to a correctional setting in the first 12 months (Bullis, et al, 2001). Project SUPPORT participants represented a high-risk sub-sample of all youth leaving youth correctional facility—those with mental health disorders and/or special education eligibility—only 15% of this sample were adjudicated or convicted of a crime in this same time period (Unruh & Gau, submitted).

Based on this promising service delivery model, the purpose of this article is twofold. First, we will provide a brief overview of the Project SUPPORT service delivery model. Second, we will focus on the specific career development activities from SUPPORT's service delivery model.

**Description of Project SUPPORT**

The purpose of Project SUPPORT was to provide incarcerated youth with disabilities, with either a designated special education disability and/or mental health disorder, with pre-release training and coordinated planning to support transition into the community. Program goals were to increase a participant’s engagement in employment and/or school enrollment (high school/post secondary) and decrease rates of recidivism.

Project participant characteristics at entry into the project provide a snapshot of the adolescent’s risks and barriers to a successful transition. The average age at entry into the project was 17.4 years which means that youth are, or shortly will be, 18 when released from the juvenile justice system. Males represented approximately 80% of all project participants. Ethnic minority status was reported for 30%, a rate well above the general Oregon population rate of roughly 9%. Ninety-two percent of participants were diagnosed with a psychiatric label from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Youth Edition (DSM-IV) (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Approximately 45% (144) were diagnosed with both a special education and mental disorder and only about 5% were solely diagnosed with a special education diagnosis.

In addition to a disabling condition, project participants demonstrated other high-risk characteristics. Using an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) in alignment transition domains (Halpern, 1985), a list of 22 barriers-to-transition were collected on project participants in the domains of (a) employment, (b) education, (c) living status/residence, and (d) family/personal. Project participants reported on average 8.5 barriers with a range of 1 through 16. The top three identified barriers included a history of (a) substance abuse (79%), (b) absenteeism or suspension from school (79%), and (c) running away.
from home or residential placement (65%). In addition, two-thirds of all participants reported prior residence in a foster care or group home and also possessed an anger management deficit. Nearly two-thirds of all participants were adjudicated at age 14 or younger, and typically, multiple crimes contributed to the adjudication and eventual incarceration of an individual. Diverse types of crimes were demonstrated by project participants. A property crime was the first crime of adjudication for 52% of the project participants. Crimes against persons were the first type of crime for adjudication for 40% of the sample. Additionally, almost 58% of all participants had not earned a high school completion document with 26% of participants had earned a General Education Development (GED) diploma and 16% of participants had earned a regular high school diploma.

The service delivery model components for this intervention are structured around features identified as effective for youth with emotional and behavioral disorders and include: (a) strategies to enhance self-determination skills in the youth with services focused on the unique needs, interests, strengths, and barriers of the youth; (b) competitive job placement; (c) flexible educational opportunities; (d) social skill instruction; and (e) immediate service coordination of wrap-around services (Bullis & Cheney, 1999).

In Project SUPPORT, we found the Transition Specialist to be the key project staff person. Each Transition Specialist works directly with the youth and parole officer to develop a project transition plan that is coupled with the youth’s parole plan. Services are provided collaboratively with staff from the three agencies along with community support agencies: (a) vocational rehabilitation counselor, (b) treatment manager, (c) parole officer, and (d) facility and community education staff. These staff work in collaboration with the Transition Specialist who provides direct services to project participants. The Transition Specialist is responsible for gaining informed consent by the project participants or their guardians to participate in the project and for data to be collected on participants. The Transition Specialist also ensures that appropriate sharing of information requisite for the sharing of various court, educational, and psychological information needed to develop an effective transition plan are signed.

The initial responsibility of the Transition Specialist is to define each youth’s strengths, needs, interests, and life goals to develop a transition plan with services aligned to the unique needs and interests of each project participant. Services are not a prescriptive set of activities provided each youth, but rely on the Transition Specialist’s ability to make decisions and connections with each
youth based on information and guidance provided by the youth, parole officer, family, and other agency staff. After a youth has been screened and referred into the project, services typically occur in three distinct phases: (a) In-facility services, (b) Immediate pre/post-release activities, and (c) Ongoing community support. See Figure 1 for list of primary activities for each phase.

Once a youth has been screened into Project SUPPORT, the Transition Specialist initiates the in-facility activities. The primary purpose of these activities is to develop a positive, mentoring relationship with the youth and define the transition needs (e.g., educational status, pre-employment skills, ongoing treatment needs) for returning to the community. The Transition Specialist works with facility staff (e.g., treatment manager and facility education staff) and the youth’s parole officer to gather information to develop a project transition plan. After reviewing a youth’s records, the Transition Specialist may find that the youth has a disability that may qualify him or her for vocational

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**Figure 1. Project SUPPORT Service Delivery Phases**

**IN-FACILITY Activities:**
- Build positive relationship between TS and youth
- Conduct formal and informal assessments to define youth’s interests, needs, and life goals
- Develop transition plan with PO, treatment manager and other community supports as needed.
- Initiate pre-employment skill building including self-determination and social skills
- Ensure appropriate assessments and ID are available for immediate access to services in community
- Liaison with PO and facility treatment and education staff

**IMMEDIATE PRE/POST RELEASE Activities:**
- Develop & implement employment options for youth in community
- Continue self-determination and social skill development
- Set up needed social services in community (e.g., mental health, A & D)
- Connect youth with community college resources
- Support youth to access services once released (e.g., transportation training)
- Develop youth’s independent living skills (budgeting, finding housing)
- Support and follow parole plan
- Liaison with PO and other community support staff

**ONGOING SUPPORT Activities:**
- Support youth to maintain engagement activities (employment, education, hobbies)
- Further develop youth’s independent living skills (e.g., taxes, getting a driver’s license)
- Assess youth for return of former negative behaviors (drug use, gang activity)
- Continue to liaison with PO and other community support staff
rehabilitation services. An individual's evaluation documentation (e.g., mental health records, special education assessments) will be shared with a vocational rehabilitation counselor located in the youth's region of exit and a meeting is scheduled with this counselor to define eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services.

Additionally, the Transition Specialist works individually with the youth to learn more about his or her career interests, aptitudes, education goals, and independent living skills. These activities include assisting the youth develop skills to (a) complete accurate job applications; (b) practice job interviews; (c) complete financial aid paperwork to enroll in school; (d) develop skills in budgeting, completing taxes, and opening checking accounts; (e) obtain needed identification cards (e.g., social security, birth certificate, etc.); and (f) locate local community resources when the youth exits custody (e.g., mental health treatment, alcohol and other drug treatment).

The most critical phase of the project is immediately prior to and following parole from the youth correctional facility: the immediate Pre/Post-Release activities. The parole officer and Transition Specialist work very closely during this phase. Their responsibilities are different but both support the community reintegration of the project participant. For example, the parole officer may have specified that the youth obtain a job as part of the parole plan, but it is the Transition Specialist who works with the youth to accomplish this goal.

While the youth is still in the youth correctional facility, the Transition Specialist works closely with the parole officer to begin initiation of set-up services to be accessed immediately when the youth enters the community. Typically, these activities consist of assisting the youth to secure employment by connecting them with a vocational rehabilitation counselor or with local Workforce Investment Act services. The Transition Specialist also provides employability skill development in the community by (a) coaching the youth in job search activities, making employer contact, and completing application processes, (b) reviewing appropriate attire to wear to interviews, and if needed, (c) job coaching to resolve problems between the employer and the youth. Other community-based supports provided by the Transition Specialist may include (a) assisting the youth to learn how to access public transportation; (b) obtaining housing (e.g., apartment searches, completing rental applications); (c) continuing a youth's education goals (e.g., completing financial aid paperwork, visiting disability services office on community college campuses); (d) navigating the ever changing health care system (e.g., obtaining a medical card, making
appointments, securing needed medications); and (e) locating healthy leisure activities (e.g., sports clubs in the neighborhood).

Once a youth has stabilized in the community and is positively engaged in work, school, or a combination of work and school, the Transition Specialist’s role is to continue collaborating with the parole officer to support and maintain the youth’s engagement within the community. This ongoing support phase includes maintaining contact with the youth, family, parole officer, and other community agencies. The Transition Specialist primarily serves as a resource and typically provides assistance in the following issues (a) how to continue to further develop employment or education goals (e.g., get a promotion or higher level position, receive additional employment training), (b) developing higher levels of independent living skills (e.g., completing taxes, obtaining car insurance), and (c) accessing services surrounding parenting needs and/or decisions. The Transition Specialists are trained to identify signs of a youth returning to former negative habits (e.g., drug use, affiliating with negative peer groups). If these signs of negative behaviors occur, the parole officer, Transition Specialist, and youth address these issues.

Overall, the focus of the service delivery model is ecological in manner in that the Transition Specialist, in alignment with the parole and transition plan, assists in the implementation of wraparound services targeted to the project participants strengths, needs, interests, and deficits. In the next section, we will describe a critical component of Project SUPPORT’s service delivery model: career development.

Career Development Programming Strategies

Career development activities for this population are divided into three main components: 1) The role of the Transition Specialist, 2) Youth focused planning and job placement (e.g., job matching), and 3) The employer and job development (e.g., employer recruitment). Each of these components is clearly interconnected and typically occurs simultaneously. We will describe each of these components.

The Role of the Transition Specialist

Throughout the service provision process, the Transition Specialist plays many roles with each adolescent and the multiple agencies used during the transition process (Luecking, Fabian, & Tilson, 2004). The Transition Specialist is a mentor, advocate, and trainer to each youth on his/her caseload by helping each youth
to navigate through the various strategies related to career development. The Transition Specialist is a relationship builder to the many individuals and agencies involved in the youth's transition plan that include (a) the youth, (b) school personnel, (c) agency staff, (d) family members, and most importantly, (e) employers. The Transition Specialist is an educator, as well, by providing information and imparting knowledge with the various community agencies about strategies for working successfully with adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system. Additionally, the Transition Specialist is a service provider to the youth to implement the transition plan. Above all, the Transition Specialist must be a creative problem solver. Each youth possesses a unique set of different strengths, interests, and challenges and it is the Transition Specialist’s responsibility to find creative solutions to support the individual’s success.

In these roles, the Transition Specialist must be cognizant that each community agency and employer offer different services and have different needs and interests relative to their specific agencies. The Transition Specialist must understand and be responsive to these differences. As a creative problem solver, the Transition Specialist must utilize effective communication skills with the various agencies in order to build trust and keep all parties knowledgeable about other components of the transition plan that are important for the youth’s success. Good communication will help build working relationships with these agencies. Effective working relationships with multiple agencies help the Transition Specialist navigate the multiple systems (e.g., employers, educational staff, mental health providers, parole) with greater ease. For example, across agencies the Transition Specialist can ensure that each agency’s sharing of information policies and eligibility criteria are met. The Transition Specialist assists in coordinating transition services accessed by the youth to make sure that no duplication or gaps in services occur for the youth and services are accessed in a timely manner. The Transition Specialist must learn how the various community agencies operate and identify the appropriate contact in each agency with whom the Transition Specialist can focus efforts surrounding the youth’s needs. These skills form the foundation upon which the Transition Specialist can initiate relationship building and creative problem solving that will be used throughout the duration of the youth’s entire transition plan.

Youth-Focused Planning and Job Placement
For an appropriate job match and ultimate job placement for formerly incarcerated adolescents, the following set of strategies are requisite: (a) youth
focused-planning, (b) informal and formal assessments, (c) development of job-seeking skills, (d) disclosure on disability and involvement in the juvenile justice system, (c) developing employment skills through starter-jobs, and (d) defining appropriate job matches and accommodations. We will describe each of these strategies and provide examples of how the Transition Specialist can address these strategies as they pertain to this targeted population.

Youth-focused planning. Youth focused planning is the foundation for the job placement process. The youth is the central focus in this process. After the Transition Specialist has introduced him/herself to the youth and explained the project’s service goals, the Transition Specialist’s goal is to focus on helping the youth define his/her interests, strengths, and needs. Bullis and Cheney (1999) defined the development of self-determination skills and focusing service on the unique needs, interests, and strengths as critical for success for youth with emotional behavioral disorders. The Transition Specialist must clearly describe this youth-centered focus to the youth and ensure that the youth is the driving partner in the development of the transition plan. The Transition Specialist, in this role, must help the youth identify his/her individual strengths, interests, and barriers and assist the youth in self-advocacy for the youth’s future plans.

Formal and informal assessments. To ensure the transition planning is youth focused to the unique needs of the youth, the Transition Specialist can incorporate an informal interview process and use assessments to help define the youth’s strengths, interests, needs, and barriers-to-transition. Such assessments may include: (a) Harrington O’Shea Career Decision Making System (CDM) (Harrington & O’Shea, 2003), Dream Cards (Curtis & Dezelsky, 1996), or the Environmental Job Assessment Measure (E-JAM) (Waintrup & Kelley, 1999). The Harrington O’Shea Career Decision Making System (Harrington & O’Shea, 2003) helps youth identify interests, values, abilities, and career ideas. Dream Cards (Curtis & Dezelsky, 1996) help youth discover what the youth “wants to have, wants to do, wants to become, and where the individual wants to go in life.” The Environmental Job Assessment Measure (Waintrup & Kelley, 1999), a functional assessment completed at the job or school site, helps the youth identify the type of accommodations needed or available on the job site, what types of jobs s/he could be successful in, what schooling or training would be a good fit, and what social skills are needed for a specific job. Informally, the Transition Specialist will also need to define the youth’s employment history. (e.g., has the youth held and maintained a job). As the Transition Specialist develops rapport with the youth, decisions can be made as to which assessments are most appropriate to administer to provide useful information.
for the transition plan and future job placement for the youth. Spending time with each youth is essential for each Transition Specialist to understand just what makes that youth "tick". The more understanding, or relationship building, the greater the likelihood of success in making a good job match.

**Job-seeking and employability skill development.** Through informally assessing the youth, the Transition Specialist will be able to determine whether the youth possesses the appropriate job-seeking skills to obtain a job and employability skills to maintain that job. Based on these assessments of job-seeking and employability skills, the Transition Specialist will work with the youth on job seeking skills and work related skills and behaviors by working on resume writing, filling out applications, and rehearsing for job interviews. A youth may not know how to compose a resume nor have access to a computer. In either case, the Transition Specialist can provide the guidance to compose the resume and a computer on which to type and print it. The Transition Specialist and youth can compose a resume that highlights the youth's strengths and experiences to be used in future job-seeking. For example, if a youth has never filled out a job application, the Transition Specialist can give the youth, once released from custody, an "assignment" to get an authentic application from an employer of interest. Once this has been accomplished, the Transition Specialist can assist the youth in completing the application. Often the youth will need guidance in how to answer tough questions such as, "Have you ever been convicted of a felony?" or simply advice on how to fill out the application legibly. Finally, a Transition Specialist may spend time with a youth posing sample interview questions and helping to craft good answers to these questions. The Transition Specialist will need to be able to provide tips for successful job interviews and include suggestions on dress, hygiene, and body language. All of these activities require regular, face-to-face contact between the youth and the Transition Specialist which implies ongoing, open communication and ensures that the Transition Specialist and the youth are operating "on the same page".

**Disclosure of disability and/or involvement in the juvenile justice system.** The Transition Specialist will need to provide guidance to the youth on what, how much, and when a youth must disclose about him/herself when applying for a job--both on the application and in the interview. Disclosure decisions are based in part on a youth's need for accommodations on a job or a desire to maintain privacy about his/her involvement in the juvenile justice system. However, a youth cannot omit or lie about his/her criminal history. The Transition Specialist must be knowledgeable about the juvenile reporting
requirements for the state in which services are provided. The Transition Specialist can assist the youth to find and practice legitimate ways to convey this information without alarming the potential employer. In essence, the Transition Specialist coaches the youth to effectively convey his/her strengths in an interview. All of these activities are geared towards helping the youth succeed in obtaining and maintaining competitive employment of their choice. The Disclosure Exploration Interview (DEI) is a 20-item structured interview that can be used jointly by the Transition Specialist and the youth to help discover what concerns a youth may have about disclosing or not disclosing specified information to a potential employer. Results of the DEI can be used to guide the youth in how to approach this issue with employers. (Halpern, Waintrup & Bullis, 2006).

**Starter-jobs or building employment history.** Often immediate employment upon release from the youth correctional facility is part of the youth's parole plan. The youth may also have restitution to victims that needs to be completed. In addition, some youth may have entered a correctional facility prior to attaining any employment history. When these situations arise, the Transition Specialist may want to take the youth's interests and strengths into consideration and tap into a pool of employers with whom the Transition Specialist may have an existing relationship, and start the youth working quickly upon release from the facility. Once the youth is working and demonstrating appropriate employment skills, the youth and Transition Specialist can start targeting jobs that will be more meaningful and satisfying to the youth. Several kinds of work experiences (e.g., volunteer, unpaid, job shadows) can be pursued with the youth, but the ultimate goal is to find a paid community job. Moreover, there are always variables in the youth’s life to take into consideration and these may cause both the Transition Specialist and the youth to examine apprenticeship programs (e.g., YouthBuild), paid work experience programs, or even work study programs. Again, it is important to remember that this process includes youth-centered planning focused on the unique needs, strengths, and interest of the youth since the ultimate goal is for the youth to gain positive experiences and remain in the community without committing new crimes.

While looking for jobs, it is important to look at what, if any, job accommodations a youth might need. Once a job has been found, it is helpful to see if there are any natural supports (i.e., sympathetic co-workers) in the work environment to support the youth. The Transition Specialist can use the E-JAM (Waintrup & Kelley, 1999) to help establish these accommodations and supports.
A youth’s criminal history must also be considered when assessing appropriate job matches for the youth. The Transition Specialist will need to confer with the parole officer to understand if there are any restrictions for the youth’s activity (e.g., contact with children, contact with felons, curfew times, and transportation limitations). The parole officer should also be used to assess how the youth’s criminal activity may limit the types of job on which the youth should focus. Bullis and Fredericks (2002) provide a good guide to help examine a youth’s behaviors when trying to determine an appropriate job placement (job match) for a youth. For example, if a youth has a history of theft, the Transition Specialist must ask him/herself whether the youth will have access to items that may be stolen at the potential job site or whether the employer provides consistent monitoring for employees. Other specific employment considerations should be made for individuals who have a criminal history that includes sex offenses, assault or other person-to-person crimes, and fire-starters. It is only by taking these issues into consideration that the Transition Specialist can help the youth make a wise choice in worksite placement.

**The employer and job development (recruitment)**

In order to match the right job with a youth, the Transition Specialist may need to participate in job development, or recruitment, work. In this section we describe strategies to recruit a potential employer pool.

As part of his/her position responsibilities, the Transition Specialist will need to develop a list of potential employers across diverse employment types who are amenable to working with youth in the juvenile justice system. To develop or expand an employer pool, the Transition Specialist needs to brainstorm and be reliant on others. The broader the net cast in networking with others, the greater the possibilities for success for the youth. The Transition Specialist must be aware of the job market and what’s happening in the community to get a sense of where potential jobs may be. Once the Transition Specialist has examined trends in the labor market, the Transition Specialist can start developing or expanding the list of employer contacts in his/her community.

The Transition Specialist should start with who he or she knows in the community and what they do, what business they might be associated with, and who they know. The Transition Specialist should be aware of local, state, and national news to maintain a sense of what is happening in the job market. Reading business magazines and attending “common purpose” group meetings
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(e.g., Rotary, Chamber of Commerce) in the community is a way to meet other employers who can increase a Transition Specialist's employer pool. The Transition Specialist should attend neighborhood, city, or state special events to network with others who might contribute to the employer pool. Additionally, the Transition Specialist can join local or national organizations, make presentations to explain what s/he does, attend local job fairs, organize special events for employers and youth, and contact employers through the mail. (Bissonette, 1994) Last, but certainly not least, the Transition Specialist must regularly look online at local job opportunity websites (e.g., employment division).

Once the Transition Specialist has developed a list of businesses to contact, contact by telephone, in person, by mail, or at events or presentations is needed. This type of a "cold call" is not always easy, but is essential for the Transition Specialist in order to meet employers, explain his/her role and why s/he is contacting them, and what is wanted from potential employers. The Transition Specialist will need to use various marketing strategies that include the benefits of working with the youth, and as importantly, the benefits the employer can expect from working with the Transition Specialist. (Luecking, et al. 2004) Marketing examples may include the use of business cards and brochures detailing the Transition Specialist's name, the services offered, and other business references who have used the Transition Specialist's services. These strategies can be useful marketing tools and should be used liberally. Before contacting an employer, the Transition Specialist needs to do some advance preparation in order to be able to provide the employer with relevant materials that describe the specific services that the Transition Specialist will be able to provide. Once contact has been made with an employer, the Transition Specialist needs to listen to the employer's description of their business and their employment needs. These descriptions will help the Transition Specialist generate specific questions to ask the employers. The Transition Specialist must be able to respond so that the employer gains relevant information about the type of employment services the Transition Specialist can provide to the benefit of the employer. The responses by the Transition Specialist need to be short and succinct and need to "speak" to the employer's language and build on any ideas the employer might have previously presented. Too often in cases when social service and the employment sector intersect, social service jargon used with employers is ineffectual because employers are used to business-oriented jargon. The result is a lack of communication. For example, instead of using a social service vocabulary, "We provide follow-up services", the Transition
Specialist might say, "We will be in touch with you regularly to see how things are going." When the Transition Specialist is trying to place a specific youth, the Transition Specialist must be prepared to explain the attributes of the youth with whom s/he works and explain the benefits of working with both the support services (e.g., job interventions) provided by the Transition Specialist and the youth. Finally in working with prospective employers, the Transition Specialist must convey that, should the Transition Specialist and employer forge a working relationship, the employer can expect competence and quality from the Transition Specialist. (Bissonette, 1994)

Undoubtedly, employers will have concerns and express them openly. The Transition Specialist must be prepared to listen and respond to prospective employers' questions. For example, often asked questions include: (a) Why should I hire someone who has been in trouble with the law? (b) Why should I hire a teen when there are many adults out there looking for work? After placement, the Transition Specialist must follow through providing quality service to maintain a positive employment environment if an employer is to continue working with the Transition Specialist, and in turn, future clients placed with the employer. Only by being prepared and providing quality service will the Transition Specialist build trust with an employer who may end up working with the Transition Specialist for many years and providing employment opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. (Bissonette, 1994)

Our intent was to provide a brief description of a facility-to-community transition project for formerly incarcerated adolescents with disabilities and specifically focus on career development programming strategies for this hard-to-serve population. These strategies may spark an interest and initiate promising practices with future Transition Specialists working with youth in the juvenile justice system. In turn, positive life-time outcomes will be achieved by juvenile offenders and their families thereby decreasing costs linked to future crimes for both the individual in terms of loss of income due to incarceration and positive life outcomes, and as importantly, costs to society including future expenses related to victimization, court costs, and extended incarceration.

References
Waintrup, Unruh | Transitioning Incarcerated Youth


Transitioning Incarcerated Youth

Waintrup, Unruh


Biographical Sketches

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