

Message from the President

The role of the university is to assist its students with obtaining the skills needed to function effectively in their personal and vocational lifestyles. The students of the Virgin Islands require a planned and smooth transition to enable their greater potential. This is no less true for our fellow Virgin Islanders with developmental challenges.

The Spring, 2003 issue of our magazine, Harambee, brings together the different groups in our diverse island communities that assist our citizens with developmental disabilities in the transition process from school to post school activities, including post-secondary education, adult services, independent living and community participation.

The University of the Virgin Islands is proud of Harambee. This issue highlights the many service providers who assist to provide the necessary information and services for smooth transition to families, friends and neighbors of people with developmental disabilities. I hope everyone who comes across this publication will take some time to enjoy reading it.



LaVerne E. Ragster, Ph.D.
President



Message from the Provost

This 8th edition of Harambee surveys the efforts of the Virgin Islands community to help our fellow citizens transition to productivity, independence and inclusion. Gone are the days when people with disabilities accepted limited expectations. People with differing abilities today rightly expect to lead full, productive and independent lives in their communities. The University of the Virgin Islands encourages the development of our communities by assisting those with challenges to play their important roles in making our society more productive, inclusive and compassionate.

I thank the many authors who have made this issue a reality. I am sure everyone will find this issue to be enlightening and enjoyable reading.

Gwen-Marie Moolenaar, Ph.D.
Provost



Message from the Executive Director

The Virgin Islands University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (VIUCEDD) chose to focus on transition services in this issue of Harambee. By definition, transition services are a coordinated set of activities and outcomes based upon needs, preferences and interests of students to promote effective movement from school to post-school activities.

This issue is written to reach young Virgin Islanders with disabilities to assure them that there are opportunities that include: vocational training, on the job training, subsidized or unsubsidized work experience and information about appropriate accommodations available to them. It is also intended to reach potential employers and remind them that there are people with disabilities who are job ready and eager to learn. Ultimately, this 8th issue of Harambee is written to reach the Virgin Islands community in general and enlighten them to the abilities of Virgin Islanders with challenges to contribute to society through their productivity, independence and inclusion. Taxpayers rather than tax consumers.

It is my hope that all who read Harambee will become advocates for our brothers and sisters with developmental disabilities.



Yegin Habtes, Ph.D.
Executive Director, VIUCEDD



Editor's Notes

Pulling together resources to help students with disabilities transition from school to work and community involvement, we present Volume Eight of Harambee. Teamwork and coordination are the keys to success in assisting our fellow citizens with challenges to be productive, independent members of our vibrant and diverse society.

We thank the many contributors who brought their specialties to this issue's discussion of transition. By cooperation and coordination, the participants involved in the transition process do great work in helping the Virgin Islands build a more productive, inclusive and compassionate economy.

Starting at the age of fourteen, young citizens are brought into the collaborative training process for work and social inclusion. With appropriate student input, the Departments of Education and Human Services provide opportunities for positive connections with independent living resources, job training and supported work activities. As students age, they participate in moving toward adult responsibilities in our communities.

Today, community leaders and employers recognize the positive contributions people with developmental disabilities can make. This is a great change from the past of limited expectations. Expectations for people with challenges today push the envelope of possibilities. We can all do our share to help make our islands a place of opportunities for all our citizens.



Mark Vinzant, Editor



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Mark Vinzant, Editor

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Change

By Mark Vinzant

Transition is change. Change from one place or status to another. We do this change all the time, every day throughout our lives. As much as us human beings want to be comfortable with things staying reassuringly the same, change is constantly inevitable. We can't avoid change.

Realizing that change rules life, we can prepare for change in our lives by studying the ways our thoughts and actions can help with the acceptance and smooth flow of life's movements. We move from infantile comforts to eagerly embrace new things that represent growth and success. Sometimes change is anxious, frightening and requires us to put great effort into our perceptions of how to manage and accommodate life's flow. It seems that change is greatly affected by how we take the changes we must make. What are our perceptions? How will our personalities adapt? What attitudes help us cope? What hinders us?

Information acquisition and forward thinking are good attitudes for the acceptance of change for positive results. This is why the U.S. Congress has passed laws and the Federal Government has issued regulations mandating transition services for students with disabilities. All students transition from school to post secondary activities. Why are transition services mandated for students with disabilities? Hard data prove that students with disabilities drop out of school in greater numbers and have more difficulty finding and keeping jobs. Unemployed; people with disabilities must rely on government supports to live. Employed; people with disabilities support themselves and contribute to the tax base. That people with disabilities interact and contribute to our society when employed is a big factor in building a positive, inclusive and compassionate culture.

Since most of us have personal stories about our own life transitions, we bring an understanding of some of the challenges faced by others. With this understanding, a measure of compassionate attitude and the cooperative structure of the transition process, students with disabilities can polish their abilities to be successfully employed contributors to our dynamic culture.

Starting at the age of fourteen, students with disabilities are brought into the process of learning about employment, expectations and responsibilities. Empowerment skills are introduced and student self-examination is encouraged to foster competent judgments and decisions. The examination of choices is encouraged, goals are collaboratively set with student input and steps along the path to goals are identified and reinforced by a team of cheerleading collaborators focused on successful transition.

When the legal age of employment is reached at sixteen, a student with disabilities should be in serious preparation for their future transition from school to appropriate post school activities in line with their potentials. Appropriate courses of study are identified both within the school system as well as opportunities in the community. Skills and behaviors are identified and cultivated to ensure positive results when graduation finally arrives. This is the time for reaching out for services our community provides to help people with disabilities join the adult world of work. Only through collaboration, coordination and cooperation with public and private community resources can a student successfully move from school to adult activities in the community.

With the coordinated investment of all collaborators, most importantly the student,

graduation will bring an adult ready to take their rightful place in the dynamics of our society. Looking at abilities; skills are developed, attitudes and behaviors are cultivated and expectations are elevated and celebrated. What types of things should be considered by educators, counselors, mentors and employers? The discussions that follow detail the players in the transition process, their mandates and the very important needs for positive attitudes and most importantly, the critical need to work together for successful outcomes.

Transition for students with disabilities requires us to start working early, in a coordinated way, to cooperatively collaborate for change. It succeeds when we work together.
HARAMBEE!!

"Let us unite in a revolution to eliminate primitive practices and stereotypes, and to establish a culture that focuses the full force of science and democracy on the systematic empowerment of every person to live his or her God-given potential. No soldier has ever died in a better cause."

Justin Dart., Jr., 1930-2002
from *Statement of Conscience*, 1998

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Transition Services: Preparing Your Child for Life After High School

By Zulma Turner



As your child with a disability grows older, your anxieties also grow. What is to become of my child? What will happen when I can no longer be there for him? How will he live? Where will he go? These are familiar questions parents of children with disabilities ask themselves all the time. Stress and anxiety can play havoc with your life if you do not plan carefully for the future of your child. You have an important role to play to ensure that your child with a disability - as with all of your children - will have as independent and self sufficient a life as possible. It is important to use the resources of the schools to help your child. One resource that high schools must provide under federal law is "transition services." Transition services can be defined as a school sponsored activity that is based upon the students needs and interests and is designed to prepare a student for the future. Under federal law, secondary schools are required to provide such services for all students with disabilities.

As a result, all students in special education - beginning at age fourteen - should have plans in place to help them achieve their lifelong plans. These plans should be implemented no later than the age of sixteen. Transitioning your child is not only an academic activity; it also begins in his or her community. The student must be directly involved in choosing these activities. These activities include: postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living and community participation. For some students, transitional services could be incorporated into their current high school classes. Others can attend specific programs to prepare for their lives after high school.

Some examples of transition service programs include:

- **Vocational Rehabilitation:** This program is designed to provide evaluations, training, job search assistance and on the job training for clients. Client decisions can also include continued education. The client Choice Program is designed to provide financial assistance for projects that demonstrate ways to increase client choice in the vocational rehabilitation process, including choice in the selection of vocational rehabilitation goals, services and providers.

- **Work - Study Programs in the Community:** Your child could receive training leading to employment and / or credit toward graduation for the work experience.

- **Regular Vocational Education Courses or Programs:** These are created to prepare students for jobs in areas such as cosmetology, food service, electronics, carpentry or other areas.

- **Special Education Vocational Programs:** These programs are designed specifically for students with disabilities and include vocational training and social skills development.

- **Community Based Instruction:** This program is often called cooperative vocational education. Students receive instruction and supervision from school staff on their jobs in the community.

- **Centers for Independent Living (CILS):** If your child needs to develop skills in the areas of self help, self advocacy and independence, he or she may be able to attend a CIL program as part of the school day or in addition to their school activities.

The most important person in any child's life is you, the parent. As such, it is very important to explore all the opportunities the school and community has to offer together.

Zulma Turner is a senior advocate with Virgin Islands Advocacy, Inc.

Transition Services

By Cyril Levine

At the secondary school level, "transition" is the buzz word throughout the United States and its Territories when referring to students with disabilities. Transition simply means movement. It also means entry or exit from one place or status to another. With regard to students, transition means entering school, moving from grade to grade and then exiting school into the adult world. When we refer to transition at the secondary level, we simply mean movement from school to the adult world, whether it be work, college, vocational training or adult living situations.

How do secondary schools prepare students with disabilities for movement (Transition) from school into the adult world? It is mandated by law that a formal transition process begins for all students by the age of fourteen or younger, if appropriate. All student must receive very specific transition services by the age of sixteen or younger, if appropriate.

What are transition services? According to Public Law 105-17, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97), transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed with an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post secondary activities, including post secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation. It is based on the individual students needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests and it includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post school adult living objectives such as adult living and employment skills. If appropriate, the acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation are included as well. The law also includes linking agency collaboration as part of transition

services. This coordinated set of activities are the components that make up a student's transition plan. These components must complement and relate to each other. The different agencies responsible for providing services must do the same, ensuring that the services they provide to students are coordinated and not duplicated.

Instruction includes:

tutoring
employability skills training
vocational education
social skills training
college entrance exam preparation
preparation for taking proficiency tests
placement in advanced classes
teacher developed accommodations,
curriculum adaptations and
peer tutoring.



Related services include:

transportation
psychological services
speech-language pathology & audiology services
physical & occupational services
recreation & therapeutic recreation
early identification & assessment of disabilities
counseling services
mobility services
rehabilitation counseling & orientation
medical diagnostic & evaluation services
school health services
social work services
parent counseling & training



Community experiences include:

tours of post secondary education settings
residential & community tours
recreation & leisure skills
personal & social skills



Adult living & employment skills include:

guidance counseling
career planning
interest inventories
person centered planning
futures planning
self determination training
job placement
job tryouts
independent living skills
community participation



Daily living skills involve:

daily self care
dressing & grooming
household chores
shopping & managing finances
obtaining a driver's license
voter registration
Selective Service registration
using transportation
carrying identification
dialing emergency numbers about



Functional vocational evaluation is an assessment process providing information about job or career interests, aptitudes and skills that may be gathered through situational assessments, observations or formal measures. Assessments should be practical and may be provided by schools or other entities.

Linking agency collaboration consists of four basic ways in which people can interact to establish or improve services and plan for young adults preparing for transition from school to the adult world. Collaboration includes networking, coordination, cooperation and sharing decisions, responsibilities and trust.

Outcome-Oriented Process refers to the results, or intended effect of the transition activities on the student. Outcomes include employment, post secondary education, vocational training, continuing and adult education, adult services, community participation and independent living. Appropriately addressing these post secondary domains during the public school years, Congress feels, will enhance a young adult's

chances to achieve an adequate level of self care, independence, self sufficiency and community integration. This is one of the most critical intentions behind the IDEA's requirements regarding transition services. Virgin Islands students with disabilities are participating in these described transition services with success. Working with students from the age of fourteen enhances their motivation, job seeking skills and expectations of success through empowerment. It is critical that providers of transition services work together to achieve successful community inclusion and productivity.

Cyril Levine is the State Supervisor for Vocational Special Education

According to IDEA Section 300.29:(a) Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that

(1) is designated within an outcome oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

(2) is based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests; and

(3) Includes:

- Instruction
- Related services
- Community experiences
- The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and
- If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

Transition services for students with disabilities may be special education if provided as specially designated instruction, or related services, if required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education.

Vocational Rehabilitation in Transition Planning

By Beverly Plaskett

The role of the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency in the transition process is defined by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. It states that "transition services" means "a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome oriented process that promotes movement from school to post school activities, which include post secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation." This process may be simple or complex because the coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, preferences, interests, strengths and availability of services.

The key to successful transition planning for students lies in the relationship between the school, the vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency and other coordinating agencies. Each agency should know the services and mandates of each other so as not to assign services to an agency that cannot be carried out and to avoid confusing students and their parents.

Vocational Rehabilitation's service planning should start, in most cases, before the student leaves school and be closely coordinated with education services from the school. While it is the right of each and every American child to a free and appropriate education and the school district has the responsibility of providing the services for the student with a disability to become a successful learner, there is no absolute entitlement to other adult services. Adult services that a student may need after leaving

high school may be restricted by eligibility criteria, long waiting lists and uncertain funding. For this reason, Vocational Rehabilitation involvement in transition planning from the age of sixteen is encouraged.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, when present at IEP meetings or called upon, should assist the special education personnel, the student and his or her parents with:

- information, guidance and vocational counseling
- assist in making informed choices based on previous assessments, experiences and student aspirations
- assist with advocating, exploring interests, finding out preferences and identifying other resources and adult service agencies that are available and what they have to offer
- determining eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services when appropriate.

The services available through vocational rehabilitation can play a critical role in assisting students with disabilities to enter post secondary education environments as well as the community workforce.

The agency is part of a team; not the sole player in the transition process.

Ms. Beverly Plaskett is the Administrator of the Division of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Services



Students, no matter what or how significant their disability may be, are the most important people involved in transition. The transition planning process should be done WITH, not FOR the student.

The Harvest

By Luz Walters



The Harvest is a supported work program on St. Croix that commenced on March 1, 2001. It was born of the simple belief that everyone has potential. Our credo is: "Harvest your potential." Our name, The Harvest, may be new but we have an accumulation of forty years of experience among our staff working with persons with disabilities.

During the short time we have opened our doors to the community, we have had many challenges and successes in placement and training. Our goal is to develop creative techniques and support services to assist each individual to succeed at work. All of the individuals that are referred to The Harvest from the Division of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Services, offices of Vocational Rehabilitation are referred for either supported employment or job placement services. Statistics indicate that there has been an increase in the number of supported work referrals. This is due to the fact that referrals of severely disabled persons have increased. We are achieving successful employment outcomes as defined by this program. Currently, there are several employees who have maintained their jobs for over two years.

The Harvest also provides other work related support services necessary for job retention. Many of our participants also need assistance in developing the skills and confidence that will enable them to achieve increasing levels of independence and improve their quality of life. We provide training and care for people with significant disabilities who are unable to manage without this support. We also employ some of our participants who are being evaluated and trained in the assembly of ball point pens. These employees work from one to three days per week.

Based on an individuals expressed

needs and needs identified by our trained staff, we provide training workshops to meet our participants needs and find the best all around solutions to their barriers to employment.

In the summer months of 2002, The Harvest participated in a situational assessment of special education students. Five students were referred from the Division of Special Education through the offices of vocational rehabilitation. We located private businesses that allowed us to place students in certain areas of their businesses for three or four hours a day. This project enabled students to be evaluated in an integrated work setting. A trainer was assigned to each student and results of this assessment far exceeded our expectations.



Michael Evelyn at work

We are constantly making changes in our program to meet the individual needs of workers with disabilities. We continue to strive to meet the demands of this highly changeable job market. And we will continue to provide ongoing quality support at employment sites based on the worker's needs for intervention to maintain employment.

Mrs. Luz Walters is an employment counselor and owner of TheHarvest

Quality Work Experiences

By Gwendolyn T. Powell

Transition means moving smoothly from secondary school to a post school activity; be it post secondary education, vocational training, independent living, integrated employment or community participation. Transition services focus on all students with disabilities ages fourteen through twenty one served by the V.I. Department of Education. Transition services help to level the playing field for students with disabilities in the workforce.

Many young people work in the part time labor force while in school. In today's job market, more and more learning is taking place on the job. Our nation has moved from an economy with many jobs for unskilled labor to an economy where most of the jobs require high skill levels and the ability to compete. The growing lack of job security, changing technology, and other changes in the economy make it imperative that learning be an ongoing lifetime activity.

Using the "person centered planning" approach, Work-Able seeks to provide quality work based experiences for students with disabilities referred by Vocational Rehabilitation. To help them compete in the job market, work based experiences include career exploration, mentoring, job assessment, job shadowing, job coaching, job placement and follow along services designed specifically for each individual.

Prior to delving into work based experiences, a Job Finding Skills Workshop is provided to those who need it. The workshop is designed to ensure that the job seeker :

- a. fully understands how to dress and act properly on the job,
- b. possesses an up to date resume',
- c. practices interviewing techniques and
- d. learns how to search various resources for potential job openings and makes appointments for their own job interviews .

As an invited participant in the Individual Employment Plan process, Work-

Able seeks to ensure that students and parents are aware of the supported employment services available and encourage their full active participation in their child's transition.

Career Exploration: This community based activity, which is a part of our job club, Interact, provides field trips to businesses of interest to allow students to see, first hand, the work that goes on in the business. Additionally, guest speakers from the community provide workshops.

Mentoring: A mentor gives students with disabilities an opportunity to have a person who works in their field of interest take a genuine interest in their career development. The one to one advice and support helps students gain a well rounded understanding of the requirements and skills needed to perform the job successfully. For the first time, last October, our community celebrated National Disability Mentoring Day (NDMD).Nearly forty students and employers participated in the one day event as part of National Disability Employment Awareness Month commemorated each October.

Job Assessment: In collaboration with employers, job assessment gives the student a chance to actually "try out" jobs of interest. These assessments usually last several days and are sometimes paid experiences.

Job Shadowing: These experiences give students the opportunity to observe workers as they do their jobs. This experience helps increase the student's awareness of various career choices.

Supported Employment: Part time paid employment in an integrated setting while still in school and full time permanent employment in post secondary school fall into the category called



supported employment (SE). Supported employment entails all of the above services plus job development, job placement, job coaching and follow along services.

Job Development: the employment specialist works closely with a student to help find the job that matches their skills, interests and abilities. During this phase, families and others are interviewed to help determine how best to proceed with job searches.

Job Placement: When a job match is found, the student is employed. If needed, transportation training to and from the worksite is provided.

Job Coaching: The job coach provides on-the-job training, as appropriate, for as long as it is needed.

Follow along: After the employee becomes proficient in performing the job, natural supports are put into place to assist the new employee to be more independent as a worker. Natural supports are co-workers, supervisors, parents and others who are positive influences in the employee's life.

It is very important to us at Work-Able to collaborate and network with businesses , employers and agencies that can help us find the "perfect" job for each person we serve. Having developed strong relationships with employers over the years, we ask them for leads, we follow the leads, we visualize the person at work and try to ensure that assistive devices needed are available. We work all angles to help job seekers find and keep quality employment in an integrated setting.

Work-Able, Inc. (WAI) is the oldest supported work agency in the territory with offices on St.Croix and St. Thomas. Since 1989, WAI has provided the above described services for hundreds of people with disabilities in the Virgin Islands. Work-Able also collaborates with other agencies that provide services to adults with disabilities, promotes community education and awareness about issues affecting persons with disabilities and is a strong advocate for full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Work-Able is in direct partnership with the Department of Human Services, Division

of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Services, usually referred to as Vocational Rehabilitation, one of the primary collaborative partners of the "Transitional Services Team."

All persons placed in employment by Work-Able earn the wages and benefits customary to their position. At no time, do we accept a job for our job seekers that pays sub-minimum wages. Work-Able focuses on ABILITY, not disability, and we believe that hiring persons with disabilities is not a charitable gesture; it is a prudent business decision.

Gwendolyn T. Powell is the executive director of Work-Able, Inc.

WHEN

- At age 14 planning must start. The student's postschool goals should be developed and transition service needs identified. The needs may include a course of study and a year by year plan to achieve goals after graduation. The IEP team must determine what instruction and educational experiences will help the student prepare for transition from high school to post school life.
- By age 16, the needed transition services must be implemented. Services should include instruction and related services, community experiences, vocational evaluation, employment and other activities involved in adult living. A statement of interagency responsibilities should be included as well as needed links to other agency services. The IEP should be updated at least annually. The IEP team should also monitor the student's high school program to be sure the student completes all graduation requirements that are identified as appropriate in the student's IEP.

Transitioning from School to Life

By Felecia Brownlow

For student with special needs, the years spent in a school setting provide a level of comfort and security for the student as well as for parents and family members. As the time for separation from high school draws near and the options appear dim and inappropriate, the frustration of parents and students is felt by entities such as the Center for Independent Living.

Student opportunities are greatly enhanced and success can be assured if training and preparation for life after high school are addressed as part of their classroom curriculum. Although some preparation takes place, statistics show that young people with disabilities are twice as likely to drop out of high school and only half as likely to finish college as compared with other American youth. Since the introduction of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), almost three decades ago, mainstreaming of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms has resulted in significant progress. This Win / Win situation provides increased opportunities for non-disabled and disabled students to interact and develop peer relationships. These preparatory years for life beyond high school allow youngsters who have friends and acquaintances with disabilities to learn to see beyond the disability and to focus on the whole person. Inclusion addresses the issue of sensitivity among peers as students with disabilities grow up expecting to interact with diverse people in the community. This process also dissolves stereotypes and prejudices.

In our community, the majority of students with disabilities are transitioned into the community to full or part time work placement or to other day activity programs. In many instances, however, students are graduating without job skills and are forced into a competitive environment for which they are ill prepared.

The Virgin Islands Association for Independent Living operates two Centers for Independent Living that have played a pivotal

role in the process of transitioning. Included in the activities of the Centers are programs to address the needs of students with disabilities who are preparing to take their rightful places in the community. Specifically, the Centers offer opportunities to minimize the frustrations of students and parents alike.

Through summer program initiatives, students in transition benefit from participation in a wide variety of community experiences. The activities promoted include visits to worksites of potential employers, becoming familiar with resources such as post offices, banks, supermarkets and recreational areas. These field trips help students explore career options and utilize skills learned in the school environment.

Summer employment at the Centers for Independent Living is also an avenue that allows students in transition to develop the type of skills needed to enter competitive employment. To the extent possible, the Centers seek all opportunities for work placement of students with disabilities at our agency or in appropriate community settings.

Each year, the Centers participate in job shadowing programs to give students in transition the opportunity to job shadow where they are exposed to peer counseling and other training opportunities offered to individuals with disabilities. During these opportunities, students are introduced to self advocacy issues and techniques pertinent to their transition from school to community life.

In the future, our Centers envision the development of a working agreement with the school system to assist students with disabilities in transition to our communities. If students with disabilities are provided with the opportunities to develop skills in the core areas of employment, money management, preventative health, training opportunities and life skills, many of the pitfalls to success can be avoided.

Ms. Felecia Brownlow is the executive director of the V.I. Association for Independent Living

Interview with Anderson Romain



Harambee had the opportunity to interview Anderson Romain, a student at the St.Croix Educational Complex, who has been involved in the transition process for two years. Young Mr. Romain is an engaging and accomplished senior who is excited about the opportunities before him. He is studying upholstery, has competed and placed eighth in national competition sponsored by the Vocational Industrial Club of America. He will compete again this year in stateside competition hoping that it will lead to scholarship opportunities.

The Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA) offers yearly a competition called Skills USA Championships to recognize career and technical students who excel in their occupational areas as well in leadership development activities. Competition is offered in forty six occupational fields and participants are judged on how well they introduce their skills, how well they demonstrate and explain their skills, how well prepared they are with appropriate tools, clothing and safety procedures and how interesting and informative their presentations are. Competition is intense with participants from all over the United States showing their skills.

Harambee: What do you understand transition to mean for you?

Mr. Romain: For me, transition means going from school to college or help in getting a job. I am learning about opportunities after school and how to take advantage of them.

Harambee: How long have you been involved in the transition process?

Mr.Romain: About two years. We first learned about self advocacy skills so we could participate in our individual education plans and transition plans. We also learned about computers to look for schools and job opportunities.

Harambee: What do you think the outcome will be for you after graduation?

Mr.Romain: I think the outcome will be very good. I will have a certificate in upholstery and I am seeking a scholarship through the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA). That scholarship will help me attend a technical school in the states. I'm excited about competing again this summer in the VICA competitions to help my chances of getting a scholarship.

Harambee: What are the important things you are learning about life after you graduate?

Mr.Romain: I'm learning a lot! It is not like I expected. Life after graduation is more difficult. It needs a careful and thoughtful approach. You need to be serious and keep your mind on your goals. The competition has helped me keep my focus and I am more self assured for having accomplished a good finish in upholstery competition.

Harambee: Would you recommend the transition process to others?

Mr.Romain: Yes. The transition process has helped me to learn to compete. It helps me to focus on my goals and to work hard toward them.

Harambee: Could you suggest any improvements to the transition process?

Mr Romain: Yes. More teachers need to get involved in this process.

Harambee: Thank you for sharing your perceptions. We congratulate you for your second consecutive win in the Virgin Islands VICA competition and the future you are making for yourself.

School to Work / Career Initiative

By Rebecca Dedmond, Ph.D., LPC

When facing the challenges of school and planning their education and career paths, youth often ask, "Why do I need this?" "Will I ever use this information in real life?" "What is out there?" "How can I be a part of it?" As they progress through school, it is important to help youth see the connections between their studies and the world outside their classroom, their community, their heritage and their future. The School to Work Initiative is about helping youth, and their parents, make the connection.

School to Work / Career Initiatives in the Virgin Islands is administered jointly by the Departments of Labor and Education. It is about building partnerships through enhanced curriculum integration, classroom activities and many activities outside the classroom.

Participants have opportunities to collaborate for employment:

- Students learn to understand their own interests and abilities and to realize that academic success is important to lifetime career planning and achievement. They obtain information about what jobs are available, what workplace skills are needed and practice in how to succeed on the job.
- Parents work in sessions that help them understand the best ways to help their children recognize and explore their talents and aspirations. In addition, they learn the importance of accessing and using available information, including computerized career preparation
- Educators enrich their classroom learning environment as they learn to implement unique and innovative ways of teaching and connecting classroom and work-world activities. They gain increased support for schools from business and labor organizations.
- Employers play a critical part in preparing the next generation of workers that will

ultimately become the leaders in their businesses.

The School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994 (PL 103-239) provided a bold, proactive, strategic framework of education reform to assist ALL students to acquire the skills, knowledge and habits they need to identify their career goals and make effective transitions from school to further education and training or work. School to Work (STW) outlined the arduous task of pulling together disparate and heretofore almost mutually exclusive sectors: K-12 public schools, post-secondary institutions, business and community - to develop and implement a coherent process and system with these key components:

1. School based learning. Rigorous classroom instruction that is linked to workplace experiences and that provides students with the information and skills they need to identify and prepare for promising careers.
2. Work based learning. Work experience, structured training and other workplace activities appropriate to students career interests and linked to school curricula.
3. Connecting activities. Efforts to help employers and schools forge and maintain links between school based and work based components.

The School to Work / Career Initiative in the Virgin Islands is, by law, governed by a council and a local partnership that is comprised of approximately thirty leaders from the Departments of Education, Labor and Human Services, parents, employers, community leaders and youth. These leaders advance the vision of creating a quality school to career transition system for all youth; pre-K through grade 16. This system has these defining features:

- Career awareness at the elementary school level



- Career guidance and exploration in middle school
- Career preparation in high school and university
- A career focused program of study (A career major) that promotes high academic standards and the skills needed to transition to post-secondary education and training
- Curricula that integrate academic and vocational learning and that exposes students to all aspects of an industry
- A planned progression of work experience and training that is coordinated with school based learning to provide students with workplace mentoring and instruction in general workplace competencies
- Efforts to ensure that ALL students have equal access to the full range of school and work based components



Hesketh Johnson at work

The Virgin Islands School to Work / Career (STW/C) System was constructed using the V.I.'s initiatives for economic development, education reform and workforce development as a foundation to prepare youth with the interpersonal, basic and technical skills for successful careers in the Virgin Islands and globally. Education initiatives have integrated the cultural heritage of the Virgin Islands Islands, work ethics, the Leave No Child Behind Act, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, and the principles of the Workforce Investment Act for the attainment of a broader, more effective youth

development program.

Each school and agency specifies grade level student competencies and designs curricula to facilitate youth achievement through integrated and contextual classroom instruction, group guidance, career days, job shadowing day, poetry contests, entrepreneurial exploration, online and electronic career information systems research and community service projects. Students learn to document experiences and skills by creating their career and educational planning portfolios.

A sequence of professional development activities throughout the territory has included materials and resources training, partnership training and two institutes - each attracting educators, youths, parents, facilitators and businesses. Materials and resources that support program implementation have been shared with all participants.

To date, School to Work / Career programs have served a broad cross section of students at all levels of ability. most notable accomplishments to date include:

- a wide range of employer engagement, including job shadowing and mentoring
- youth who have broadened their career options and plans
- measured student achievement - attendance and grade improvement
- broader youth development goals and better planning for the future
- increased access to caring adult mentors
- funding that has stimulated enduring new systems
- enhanced student motivation
- ongoing partnerships among businesses, schools, post secondary institutions and youth serving groups.

While these accomplishments are extraordinary for a three year implementation period, there is much left to do. To become involved contact us at 773-1994.

Rebecca Dedmond, Ph.D., LPC is Coordinator of the STW/C program

Projects with Industry

By Carolyn Smith-Dempster

Beginning now, you and other members of service organizations and members of the employer community throughout the Virgin Islands have an unprecedented opportunity to structure bold new ways of finding and hiring V.I. citizens. Given today's dynamic workplaces, where skill demands are increasing rapidly and qualified workers are difficult to find, the timing couldn't be better.

Projects with Industry (PWI) is a new system of workforce investment designed to transform and reposition a fragmented assortment of programs and services into a comprehensive alignment of training and support services. The goals are:

- improve quality training and life skills for employees and to
- broaden the base of qualified workforce applicants for employers.

PWI is a network of employment specialists and service providers positioned to work with citizens, employers and organizations that provide services to those who have medical conditions preventing them from finding gainful employment. PWI is business led and market driven. Employers and workers alike will find PWI services more relevant to actual workplace needs.

What can clients expect from the PWI network? Employment and service providers know that their job is to inform individual clients about business expectations. Individualized assistance and support from employment specialists includes:

- prescreening and skills assessment including personal interviews, job applications and reference checks
- career planning for advancement and improvement
- skills training in a variety of computer applications including database management, spreadsheet, internet web design and management
- skills training in office skills including accounting, bookkeeping, composition and writing
- communication skills, customer services, sales and management skills
- hospitality and tourism training programs
- permanent placements
- assistance with childcare and transportation

What can employers expect from the PWI network? Employer satisfaction counts! Business needs matter! PWI will measure employer satisfaction with quality, relevance and responsiveness of services. PWI will ensure that

workers understand workplace needs. PWI provides a continuum of services to:

- organize activities and plans to improve employee achievement and success
- work closely with employers to ensure effective employment of clients
- assist employers with assistive technology planning and installation when needed by client
- document and present client's related education, training, capabilities and performance
- provide access to qualified service providers
- provide customized training tailored to workplace needs
- make referrals to other education, training and social services as needed
- coordinate child care, transportation, counseling, social services and vocational rehabilitation services

How can we work together? How does the process work? Linkages are the key! PWI partners can connect with PWI in real or virtual modes to post job openings, access a pool of people with the skills to do those jobs and learn about the best education and training services.

Employers are expected to post and share skill requirements including education, training, capabilities and performance requirements. They are also expected to share job listings.

PWI is expected to help develop plans of action and make connections with all customers, clients, employers and other agencies. PWI will also conduct on site meetings with employees and employers as well as serve as liaison between employers and training opportunities for employees.

PWI is a victory for both employers and employees. It all hinges on the active involvement of all partners to make it work. This is a great opportunity to take a fresh look at developing human talent. Participants can influence the process and make sure the workforce investment initiative responds to workplace needs. Participants can help align education and training to workplace standards and implement workforce systems. The Projects with Industry is a partnership of nonpartisan leaders in business, education government and training. For more information call 777-2253 or 773-1994.

Carolyn Smith-Dempster is project director of PWI



Taking the First Steps

STUDENTS

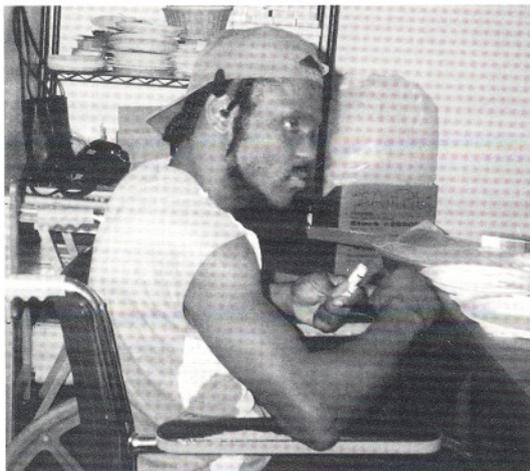
- Write down your long-term goals and what you think you need to do to reach these.
- Read your IEP and transition plan and decide if the plan is being implemented.
- Tell your teachers you want to lead your own IEP meeting and ask them to help you learn what to do.
- Learn about your civil rights under the law, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Learn about your disability, how to explain to people your strengths, and how to ask for reasonable accommodations.
- Talk with your doctor and parents about your health care needs so you will be ready to take responsibility for them.
- Ask your teacher how to get involved with your community's transition team.



Marilyn Lewis going to work

FAMILY MEMBER

- Observe your son or daughter's independent living skills, work behaviors, social involvement, dreams, and hopes.
- Call your child's teachers and ask that transition services, including financial planning, be addressed at your next meeting.
- Help your child learn about his or her disability and how to ask for the supports he or she needs.



Neville Francis in training

- Give your child responsibility for chores at home.
- Role play different situations with your child (e.g. interviews).
- Discuss your child's medical needs with him or her and facilitate discussions with your doctor.
- Introduce your child to adult role models with disabilities.
- Look in your phone book and yellow pages and identify three new possible resources to help your son or daughter's transition to adult activities

WHAT IS COLLABORATION ?

There are basically four ways in which people can interact to establish or improve services and plan for young adults preparing for transition from school to post-school activities. Let's look at these methods briefly.

Through NETWORKING people gain an awareness of available resources and discover how to access or refer individuals to those services. An example of networking might be a transition coordinator talking with local business owners to identify possible job training sites for students. While networking is an essential step in collaboration, it will not be enough for students who have complex transition service needs.

Service COORDINATION assists in the selection and scheduling of services. In coordinating, people arrange for a student with disabilities to receive specific services from different agencies. For example, one agency making a phone call to another agency to determine their respective roles and to schedule activities.

With COOPERATION, people look for ways to support and complement one another's transition services. For example, an adult services agency may accept a student's recent test results from his or her school to determine the student's eligibility for services. This would prevent the student from being tested twice and would save the adult services agency time and expense.

COLLABORATION begins with networking, coordination and cooperation and then requires team members to share decisions, responsibility and trust. It requires that team members invest time and energy to come up with options and design strategies for carrying out these plans. Because collaboration requires lots of time and energy, it is impossible to make all decisions collaboratively. In some instances, the desired result can be achieved through networking, coordination or cooperation. Working together, or collaboratively, invites participation of multiple service providers and the use of multiple resources.

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities

Virgin Islands University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

MISSION

The VIUCEDD was established in to enhance the quality of life of individuals with disabilities and their families and to provide them with the tools necessary for independence, productivity, and full inclusion into community life.

PRINCIPLES

- Families should be supported in their role as caregivers of and experts about their children.
- Community services and support should be flexible, available, and accessible.
- People should have the right to be involved in the design and monitoring of services and programs they use.
- The competencies and contributions of people with disabilities should be recognized and supported.
- Communities are enhanced by the full participation of individuals with disabilities in all areas.
- Competent and caring professionals can make a difference.

GOALS

- To provide interdisciplinary training and education.
- To demonstrate exemplary approaches in clinical, educational and community setting.
- To provide technical assistance.
- To disseminate information related to the implementation of best practices.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM
COMPUTER TRAINING
INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
PAPAEDUCATOR CERTIFICATE PROGRAM
AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER TRAINING
PARTNERS IN POLICY MAKING
SCHOOL INCLUSION PROJECT
POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT PROJECT
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
INSERVICE TRAINING
RESPITE CARE PLANNING PROJECT

ST.Thomas - UVI Campus (340) 693-1323 • ST.Croix - UVI Campus (340) 692-1919

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