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VR Counselor Experiences with Pre-Employment Transition Services: Lessons from the Field

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About your Host

Mission Statement: Improving lives of people with disabilities through meaningful work and community inclusion.

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VR Counselor Experiences with Pre-ETS

Ellen Fabian & Richard Luecking

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Context of the Study

The Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) was enacted in July, 2014

The Act required state VR agencies (SVRAs) to reserve 15% of their federal funds for Pre-Employment transition services

The Act's mandates expanded the pool of VR consumers to include those who are eligible and potentially eligible for VR Services

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Pre-Employment Transition Services

What are the Required Pre-ETS?

Job exploration counseling

Workplace readiness training

Work-based learning experiences
Counseling on postsecondary enrollment
Instruction on self-advocacy

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What are VR agencies required to do?

Offer Pre-employment transition services to students (enrolled in secondary or post-secondary institutions) who are eligible or POTENTIALLY eligible for VR services

Conduct outreach to partners, such as schools and families, to provide information and referral on VR and Pre-Employment Transition Services

Develop partnerships with LEAs and community providers to deliver Pre-ETS services to students via structured service agreements with state SVRAs

Document and record Pre-ETS services authorized by the SVRA to meet federal reporting requirements

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Background of the Current Study

We conducted a national survey on SVRA counselor transition practices in 2016 with more than 500 respondents

Neubert, Luecking & Fabian (2018)

Survey conducted after enactment of WIOA, BUT before regulations fully implemented and prior to SVRAs scaling up for delivery of Pre-ETS

However, Pre-ETS were “on the horizon” as the results of the study indicated:

VR counselors identified 3 Pre-ETS as among most important transition practices

VR counselors indicated they needed additional information and skills to provide them

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The Current Study

Designed a qualitative interview study of a sample of the VR counselor respondents to the original survey

Selected respondents based on their experience under WIOA offering Pre-Employment Transition Services

Developed a short interview protocol to capture respondent experiences with Pre-ETS and WIOA

Conducted 30-minute telephone interviews in fall 2017

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What did we ask?

How did WIOA impact your role?

What is your experience in delivering pre-employment transition services?

What are the major challenges you encounter in delivering pre-employment transition services?

What strategies have you devised to address them?

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Participants

52% female

14 or 48% were CRCs

Average years in VR = 12.9

Average years working with youth/young adults = 11

Caseload proportions

15% had entire caseload of transitioning youth (including students and out-of-school school)

67% had caseloads of both adults & transitioning youth

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Participating State VR Agencies

Illinois

Iowa

Missouri

Minnesota

North Dakota

Oregon

Wyoming

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How does WIOA/Pre-ETS impact your role?

We had positive & negative responses to this question.....

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Positive Impact of WIOA & Pre-ETS

Better relationship with schools: More time in the schools

More outreach to families to engage youth

Start students in VR at an earlier age – a continuum of services

Teachers are “on board” with vocational rehabilitation

Expand VR population to include students with 504 plans

Already have transition programs in place – Pre-ETS formalizes the delivery

More invitations to IEP meetings

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What they said...

“Outreach to schools is a good way to establish relationships and rapport with students BEFORE they are formal VR clients.”

“I estimate that I spend twice as much time in schools as I did pre-WIOA. Also I have a different relationship...schools proactively send me referrals, rather than me seeking them out.”

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What they said...

“I no longer beg schools for referrals. The relationships are much more defined since there is a specific process to follow (Pre-ETS) and the teachers definitely see the value of Pre-ETS”

”I would say that my outreach to schools and time spent with them has doubled since WIOA”

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Not So Positive Impacts

More reporting requirements

Larger cases to manage

Great to focus on students – but comes at a cost to the adults on the caseload

Inadequate or just unavailable community providers to deliver pre-ETS services

Essential services that can't be covered – like transportation impede delivery of some of the services

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What they said...

“It seems that adults on my caseload will receive less attention and fewer services.”

”One of our VR counselors has a caseload of 240 students! I don’t know how she does this...”

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What’s your experience in delivering Pre-ETS?

What services do you offer?

Who Delivers PreETS Services?

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What Pre-ETS services are offered?

Most VR respondents directly delivered two of the Pre-ETS:
Post-secondary Counseling and Job Exploration Counseling

Most respondents contracted out 2 Pre-ETS services (to schools or CRPs): Work readiness training & work-based learning experiences

Several respondents indicated they used Pre-ETS services as a continuum or pathway to VR services – students start early and progress

These findings are consistent with other reports

Miller, Sevak, & Honeycutt, 2018

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What local issues influence Pre-ETS?

States with Order of Selection encountered additional challenges in expanding the pool to potentially eligible students

Rural states in our sample cited inability to cover costs of transportation impeded some Pre-ETS, particularly Work-based learning experiences (WBLEs)

States with Summer Youth Employment, Project Search tended to rely on these existing providers to assist with delivery of Pre-ETS

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What they said...

“I conduct a class once a month at a local school where I use career assessments and exploration to counsel students about college and career training”

”Referrals from younger students allows me to think about Pre-ETS from the standpoint of a career pathway”

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What are the challenges to delivering Pre-ETS?

Families are not familiar with VR – didn't follow through on the Pre-ETS application process

Increased caseload burden & paperwork!

Lack of available community and school resources to deliver Pre-ETS services

Transportation

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What they said...

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What they said...

“The biggest barrier is lack of time to serve all these students through Pre-ETS – and paperwork associated with this activity is also a barrier”

“Challenges rather than barriers” – staff and resources. The challenge to serve is always bigger than staff and resources available.”

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What are the strategies to address barriers?

Specialized caseloads or specialized transition counselors to meet the “expanded” eligibility pool

Existing transition programs within or external to schools (such as Project Search) facilitated the adaptation to Pre-ETS

“No wrong door” - having VR, workforce, CTE & other services under one roof

Creative transportation solutions (travel training, Uber/Lyft, VR-sponsored stipends so that students could self-arrange transport services)

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What they said...

“I plan ahead to make better use of “windshield time” – make sure my time at a school is fully booked

“I try to make Pre-ETS more motivational and fun – getting students out into the community helps them see connections between school and work”

“We are not there yet”

“More flexible with my schedule – meet with students and families in the evenings – try to make time for more personal contact”

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What they said...

“I find it most useful to meet with students whenever they want to and we are now all housed in one place – at our Work Source Office”

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Lessons Learned

SVRAs still in early stages of adaptation to WIOA, and the evidence not clear yet as to which services to which students contribute to successful outcomes.

The better the relationships among LEAs, CRPs, and VR, the easier the adjustment to delivery of Pre-ETS.

Specialized caseloads or specialized counselors can lighten the load and ensure expanded Pre-ETS services.

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Lessons Learned

Some VR agencies adapt Pre-ETS services as career pathways – offering job exploration and self-advocacy to younger students; then moving toward work-based learning experiences in community integrated settings

Largest state distinction was rural vs. urban: transportation & available resources

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References

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Questions or Comments

On the webinar platform use the questions feature to submit your questions.

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Upcoming Webinar:

Managing Community Support Services for Individuals with Disabilities & Supporting Field-Based Staff

April 16th, 2019

2:00 – 3:30 PM EST

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About TransCen, Inc.

TransCen, Inc. is a national organization offering web-based and in-person training for state agencies, school districts, provider organizations, and others interested in meaningful work and community inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

Transcen.org

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Thank You!