



THE HSC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM
The HSC Foundation

The HSC Foundation's Youth Transitions Initiative

OVERVIEW — The HSC Foundation is launching a multi-year **Youth Transitions Initiative** to assist young people with disabilities and chronic illness in the Washington metropolitan area and beyond to move from school to adulthood and the world of work. In order to move the transition agenda forward to a higher level, the Foundation has identified three broad categories of effort required: (1) improving the connections among the varying programs and systems of services; (2) promoting high expectations among the transitioning youth, their families, service providers, and employers; and (3) assisting in the development of a competent workforce to provide transition services. The Foundation's approach to transition will be comprehensive and include health, education, vocational training, youth development, employment, and social components.

**The HSC Foundation's
Youth Transitions Initiative**
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The HSC Foundation's Youth Transitions Initiative

*The HSC Foundation (HSCF) is launching a new **Youth Transitions Initiative**, designed to become a long-range signature project to assist young people with disabilities and chronic illness in the Washington metropolitan area and beyond to move from school to adulthood and the world of work. The aim is for the Initiative to become a central resource in the field of youth transitions, filling gaps in information and providing support for organizations that are involved in transitioning youth. The Foundation's approach to transition is intended to be comprehensive, and as such, will include health, education, vocational training, youth development, employment, and social components. The Initiative's ultimate goal is to strengthen transition programs and services and stimulate other investments in the field.*

In order to move the transition agenda forward to a higher level, the Foundation has identified three broad categories of effort required:

- Improving the connections among the varying programs and systems of services;
- Promoting high expectations among the transitioning youth, their families, service providers, and employers; and
- Assisting in the development of a competent workforce to provide transition services.

These are not mutually exclusive but they do represent key points of interest and participants. In some instances, government has the clear lead role for specific actions, such as providing incentives and perhaps regulatory relief to promote collaboration among programs. However, private and corporate foundations can provide critical assistance to spur innovations and support in several areas.

Aligning Systems

In order to be successful in the world of work, an individual must be exposed to the most promising practices that have been developed in school-based and work-based learning programs. While it is highly desirable that all youth with disabilities be exposed to all the services identified as critical to a successful transition, there is substantial evidence that alignment between certain systems needs particular attention. Specifically, the mental health, juvenile justice, and foster care systems need improved linkages with the workforce development and education systems.

Only in the recent past have some small steps begun to improve the linkages among the workforce development programs and these other core systems of care and support. However, evidence from a variety of federal and state funded youth programs suggests that escalation of a focus on the part of multiple participants to align these systems is sorely needed and must be addressed based on a common transition policy framework. Currently that framework does not exist.

Additionally, another challenge facing youth who are in the transition process is the fragmented nature of the health care system serving them. It is not uncommon for one youth to have interactions with many different health service providers (e.g., hospitals, physician offices, mental health providers, etc.), each of which is concerned with only one aspect of that individual's life. There are additional coordination obstacles when a youth transitions from pediatric to adult medicine. Integrated service models do exist for transitioning youth to adulthood. One of the most common is the medical home model, which focuses on providing comprehensive, coordinated, continuous, culturally appropriate, and family-centered care. Unfortunately, many internists and family medicine physicians are not familiar with this model or how to provide this type of care. Furthermore, there is not adequate funding to compensate and incentivize providers to organize their practices around this model.

Cross-systems collaboration is the key to providing youth with all the opportunities, supports, and services they need to successfully transition from adolescence to adulthood and the world of independent living. In addition, as so many of the "neediest" youth are engaged in several systems at once, cross-systems collaboration makes financial and administrative sense.

Promoting High Expectations

Too few opportunities exist for youth with disabilities to participate in youth development and leadership activities. While the literature centered on self-advocacy and self-determination indicates that these skills contribute to the growth, development, and self reliance of youth with disabilities, there are myriad youth development and leadership opportunities to which these youth are not sufficiently exposed (e.g. conflict resolution, socialization skills, mentoring, role models, peer support, etc.).

In the past decade or so, several program models have emerged that attempt to offer youth development and leadership opportunities. For example, High School/High Tech is a national network of state and locally operated programs designed to provide high school students with disabilities the opportunity to explore jobs or post-secondary education leading to technology-related careers and, at the same time, offer personal growth and development guidance. Likewise, 23 states currently hold some form of a Youth Leadership Forum for youth with disabilities, where participating high school youth convene at the state capitol for several days of exposure to leadership opportunities, including meeting people with disabilities in key leadership positions. However, all of these efforts are relatively small in the number of youth they reach.

In addition to exposing the youth to these programs, their families, schools, health and social service providers, and employers must be educated around raising their expectations about the future of young people with disabilities and what they can accomplish. Evidence abounds that all too often the lack of high expectations for youth with disabilities leads

many professionals in schools and other institutions, including businesses, to operate on a set of assumptions that people with disabilities cannot meet the knowledge and skill requirements of today's workplace, especially for careers with attractive growth opportunities. There is a serious cost to this lack of high expectations that is difficult to quantify---but is very real nonetheless. A series of activities and services driven by promoting high expectations by all those involved with the youth is clearly needed. There are some current initiatives that are rooted in a high expectations strategy, but more is highly desirable.

Improving Capacity of Front Line Providers

Skilled practitioners are necessary to make the most of any program dollars invested. A fundamental reality is that skilled and knowledge-able staff form the backbone of any quality program. Research has shown the importance of caring adults in youth's lives, and inter-actions with staff have been cited repeatedly as the reason that youth stay in or leave a program. Therefore, the ability of youth service practitioners to engage and retain youth is a key piece of the workforce development system's ability to prepare young people for adulthood and the world of work.

Professionals who work with transitioning youth — including case managers, school counselors, social workers, job developers, and independent living specialists — are often the first contact or "face" of the workforce development system for youth and must possess specific knowledge, skills, and abilities to work with this emerging workforce. However, there is currently no national system of professional development that identifies, builds, and certifies the credentials of youth service practitioners.

There is also a tremendous need to develop training programs and other tools to help physicians, nurses, and other health care providers do a better job with transitioning youth into adulthood. A variety of tools and protocols are needed to assist health care practitioners understand the youth's perspective on his/her disability, provide guidance to assist in personal development, and on how to access resources in the community.

Conclusion

The successful transition of youth to adulthood and a productive, independent life requires higher levels of coordination and collaboration across systems and across agencies, raised expectations about the future of young people with disabilities, and trained and competent youth service practitioners and health care providers to support the transition process.

While there has been some progress in the field of transition, there is still much work to be done. The HSC Foundation — by serving as a convener, collaborator, and funding partner — aims to support the momentum around a new transition framework, whether through new or existing initiatives and projects. The Foundation has adopted four overarching principles to guide its transition initiative:

- To work with partners on all initiatives
- To select initiatives that address identified information or service gaps and that add value to existing work
- To bring additional funding (federal, corporate, foundation) to initiatives by serving as a funding partner
- To conduct initiatives that have local impact and national relevance

The Foundation's programmatic approach is organized by three major categories of effort:

Research and Policy

Program evaluation
Capacity building
Convening

National Initiatives

Education/awareness
Capacity building
Convening

Regional and Local Initiatives

Education/awareness
Programs/services
Resource development

To begin building its youth transitions initiative agenda, the Foundation convened two roundtables with national experts and produced briefings on the findings and recommendations.

Youth Transitions Summit

On September 21, 2006, The HSC Foundation convened a summit of professionals, youth with disabilities, and their families to examine the education, career preparation, independent living, and social and attitudinal barriers to successful transitions and to recommend initiatives that might be undertaken to increase the successful transition of youth with disabilities.

http://www.hscfoundation.org/aboutus/publications/youth_transitions_summit.pdf

Health Issues Impacting Youth Transitions Roundtable

On November 28, 2006, The HSC Foundation convened clinician experts to obtain their insights on health issues related to youth transitions, including identifying those areas where there is the greatest need for improvement.

http://www.hscfoundation.org/aboutus/publications/health_impact_roundtable.pdf



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The HSC Foundation is dedicated to improving access to services for individuals with special needs who face challenging health care and social barriers. The Foundation has distinguished itself by its concern for and specialization in children's medical services and urban issues, particularly in the Washington metropolitan area. An important asset is the Foundation's connection to a working subacute hospital (The HSC Pediatric Center) and a care coordination health plan (Health Services for Children with Special Needs, Inc.) that have reputations of outstanding service to children and youth with disabilities and chronic illnesses. The Foundation serves as the parent organization to both of these nonprofit organizations.