



THE HSC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

**The HSC Foundation**

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# Career Investigations for Transitioning Youth (CITY)

Executive Summary

March 2010

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# Career Investigations for Transitioning Youth (CITY)

## Background

Successful youth transition from high school to adult life is important to all of us. This multi-faceted process is most effective when supported by diverse stakeholders beyond students and their families. This includes secondary schools whose mission is to graduate students prepared to be life-long learners. Post-secondary education programs benefit when youth come prepared academically and socially to achieve their desired credentials. Employers benefit when they are able to hire employees who know how to integrate into the work environment and take responsibility for their actions. Service learning programs, another post-secondary option, benefit when they are able to recruit young people who are ready to experience personal growth while providing volunteer services to meet a community need. For students with disabilities we can add a fourth stakeholder group, state and local organizations, such as rehabilitation services, accessed by young adults with disabilities who need additional support to navigate life beyond high school.

Preparation for transition is a well-documented need for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities must learn first to understand their areas of strength and need and then be prepared to translate this knowledge to environments that may vary drastically from their high school experiences. Societal recognition of the need for transition preparation for youth with disabilities resulted in explicit federal legislation. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates on-going transition planning no later than age 16. Unfortunately, this mandate is often paid lip service at best. Individualized student planning for transition services is the most common area of non-compliance in both federal and state IDEA monitoring (Clark, 2008, p. 107). One reason for this lack of transition planning is that it can be difficult to integrate academic preparation leading to a high school diploma to the broader life domains that should be part of transition planning.

“Individualized student planning for transition services is the most common area of non-compliance in both federal and state IDEA monitoring.”

Federal legislation identifies 13 diagnostic categories used to identify students with disabilities. Some of these disabilities are obvious such as visual and hearing impairments. The physical nature of these disabilities makes it easier for these individuals with disabilities, as well as their teachers and employers, to understand the accommodations necessary for learning and work. We refer to other disabilities as hidden disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, attention deficit/hyperactive disorder and Asperger's syndrome). These disabilities are not apparent until the individual tries to engage in a task that is difficult or impossible to accomplish without accommodations (e.g., reading complex information, interpreting social interactions). The hidden nature of such life challenges necessitates that individuals with these disabilities understand their areas of strengths and needs, have learned ways to use strengths to compensate for needs and to communicate this unique profile in post-secondary work and learning environments. This understanding is a developmental process best accomplished when youth can participate in ongoing assessment and guidance as they experience a variety of work and school experiences.

Supported by The HSC Foundation, The George Washington University and Kingsbury School developed a university-school partnership, Career Investigations for Transitioning Youth (CITY), to develop a community-based transition program based on the recognition of these needs. This program demonstrates how partnerships between universities and high schools can result in rich and relevant transition preparation for students with disabilities. The focus of this model is to use the varied work environments available at colleges/universities as a venue for community-based career exploration and assessment.

### **Kingsbury's Comprehensive Approach to Youth Transition**

The CITY program is an integral part of comprehensive transition planning that includes school-based, work-based and connecting experiences.

#### *School-Based Experiences*

Kingsbury's school-based experiences are centered on a four-year curriculum to develop students' self-understanding in

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relation to their future post-secondary lives. The curriculum consists of the following transition courses:

- **Personal Awareness** – The course was developed by the school social worker and transition coordinator to help 9th grade students adjust to the challenges of high school. Course content includes understanding high school requirements, goal setting, decision making, personal exploration and disability understanding.
- **Career Exploration** - This 10th grade class is divided into two sections. In the first quarter, students work on job development skills where they learn how to find and complete an application, develop a personal resume, and participate in mock interviews. After mastering these job seeking skills, students embark on a personal career exploration path where they take inventories that assess interest, values and preferences. Students analyze how these results fit with their desired work environments, salary preferences and post-secondary educational goals. A final research project investigating a possible future career path completes the course.
- **Integrated Career Skills** – This course is a key component of the CITY program. As part of the class, students participate in community mapping, job site visits, and job shadowing experiences at The George Washington University and use class time to reflect on these experiences. In class, students set weekly and daily goals, take vocational assessments, and develop CITY portfolios. Students work independently to complete the following workplace modules: Success on the Job, Communication in the Workplace, Getting Paid, and Using Computers at the Office. Upon successful completion of the course, students have the opportunity to apply for paid internships.
- **Senior Seminar** – In fall of their senior year, students begin the application process for post-secondary educational, training, and work programs. The class is designed to help students choose appropriate post-secondary programs. This class helps students stay organized throughout the application process and provides support in writing college essays and completing and submitting applications.

### *Work-Based Experiences*

The CITY program provides a range of work-based experiences for 11th grade students on the GWU campus as part of the Integrated Career Skills curriculum. These experiences begin with on-campus group activities and end with the option of paid summer internships. Work-based experiences span between four and seven months.

### *Connecting Activities*

Students integrate their learning from school-based and work-based learning using an on-going career assessment process. Prior to the CITY program, students take career interest inventories as a way to begin thinking about their strengths, needs and preferences. Each CITY experience includes an assessment activity that allows students to identify their developing career knowledge and interests based on experiential learning at the university. These connecting activities feed into the transition planning process as students and their families plan the transition from high school.

### **The CITY Program**

The CITY program helps students explore post-secondary options through a range of experiences on a university campus.

### *Why Use a University Campus?*

A university is like a small town. It employs a broad range of employees—from grounds keepers to university attorneys. Universities also employ specialists who provide support services to students with disabilities. In addition, many university students participate in organizations that engage in community service, which can naturally extend to interacting with high school youth engaged in on-campus experiences. A school-university partnership can powerfully enhance this resource base to positively influence youth who have the potential to be future university students, employees or both.

*“A school-university partnership can powerfully enhance the resource base to positively influence youth who have the potential to be future university students, employees or both.”*

### *How Does CITY Provide Work-Based Learning Activities?*

The CITY program begins with group explorations of educational and employment experiences and ends in individualized career exploration and paid work experience.

**Community Mapping.** Students are introduced to the university through a hands-on, active experience called community mapping. Students work in small teams to use a map to explore different parts of the university campus. Teams visit departments and student services, interview selected individuals and collect information. Teams are then responsible for organizing the information and sharing it with the other teams. The result is an introduction to the physical layout of the campus as well as an overview of a range of educational and work opportunities at the university.

**Disability Support Services (DSS).** Students benefit from learning about university disability support services. In particular, DSS arranges for a panel of undergraduate students with disabilities to share their college experiences and words of advice for their younger counterparts. The importance of self-knowledge, self-advocacy and using accommodations is an important part of the message provided by the panel members.

**Job Site Visits.** Job site visits are initial opportunities for students to explore workplace environments. These visits are planned based on students' responses to career interest inventories. Accompanied by a teacher, students take a tour of a job site and learn about available jobs, job requirements and responsibilities. Visits last approximately one hour and provide an opportunity for students to ask questions and form opinions based on the experience. For some students, this verifies their interest, for others it provides an experience that allows them to question their initial interest.

**Job Shadowing.** Students participate in two job shadowing experiences. This is an opportunity for students to spend two hours experiencing the tasks associated with particular jobs of interest to them. Students are matched with an employee and the student follows the employee, to learn about daily responsibilities and work expectations.

“CITY is one of the few program models available that incorporates on-going career and transition assessment for students with learning and related disabilities in a diploma track program.”

*Paid Internships.* Internships are an opportunity for students to experience a career area of interest and gain experience in the workplace. Students complete an application process including developing a resume, filling out an application and interviewing. Internships are 20 hours a week for five weeks in the summer. Students also participate in career development workshops run by a teacher. These sessions help students explore what they are learning from the experience and supports them in problem solving any issues they encounter on the job.

### **CITY Replication**

The CITY program meets the often-neglected transition needs of students with disabilities enrolled in diploma track programs. Despite their academic preparation, these students are at risk for an unsuccessful transition to their immediate post-secondary choice, be it education, employment or service. These students' 'hidden disabilities' make it essential that they find education and employment options that match their interests and skills and minimize their areas of need. In addition, they must develop the ability to communicate their strengths and needs to post-secondary educators and employers in order to receive accommodations.

With planning, the CITY program model can be incorporated into a secondary school program. The school-university partnership is beneficial to both partner organizations. It greatly extends the experiences a secondary school can offer its students. For a college/university, it allows it to be a contributing member of its community and the paid internships can provide needed employees during the summer.

#### *Why is CITY a Program Model that Should be Replicated?*

CITY incorporates youth transition practices supported by research. Kingsbury's goal is to incorporate best practices for transition into its school program. This goal led to the development of the CITY program as a way to provide work-based learning for all of its 11th grade students and to connect work-based learning to students' school experiences.

*“With planning, the CITY program can be successfully incorporated into a secondary school program, benefitting both the school and the college/university partner.”*

The CITY program promotes the following practices associated with effective transition services (Greene & Kochhar, 2003).

- Recognition of individual needs
- Family/parent involvement in transition planning
- Career assessment and exploration
- Work-based learning
- Social and personal skills development
- Collaboration between schools and post-secondary education and employment

### *Why is CITY unique?*

CITY is one of the few program models available that incorporates on-going career and transition assessment for students with learning and related disabilities in a diploma track program. While it is easy to administer an online interest inventory in a classroom, transition assessment must be comprehensive and should include hands-on and community-based assessment. The CITY experience guides students through the assessment process to help them understand and interpret their findings into meaningful information. Along with the written and Internet-based assessments, the most meaningful data results from the community-based work experiences. Each CITY activity—from community mapping through summer internships—provides students the chance to be in different social and work scenarios. These experiences enable students to identify and record their own skills, strengths, needs, likes, and dislikes. The students also receive feedback from teacher observations during community mapping and job site visits and evaluations from the employer partners as part of the job shadowing and internship experiences.

Students keep their career assessments, as well as their community-based self-assessments and feedback from employers and teachers in their Integrated Career Skills Class Portfolio. Teachers, guidance counselors, students and their families use this information to develop appropriate and meaningful IEP transition goals and post-secondary plans. Through this carefully structured experience, the CITY program becomes a collaborative experience for providing valid and reliable information to use in transition planning.

*“Teachers, guidance counselors, students and their families can use information gained through the CITY experience to develop meaningful IEP transition goals and post-secondary plans.”*

### *How can the GWU-Kingsbury-HSC Partnership Support CITY Replication?*

The CITY program has developed a comprehensive user-friendly manual that describes how to develop the program on a college/university campus. The manual also contains forms that can be used throughout the program to collect on-going transition assessment information. In addition, the CITY program is offering web-based and face-to-face workshops and follow-up consultation.

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## Partner Organizations



The George Washington University's Transition Special Education Program is dedicated to the preparation of youth and adults with disabilities for satisfying and productive living. The program offers professional preparation for education and rehabilitation professionals, conducts research, offers technical assistance and develops demonstration projects.

<http://gsehd.gwu.edu/TSESPED>

<http://www.heath.gwu.edu/>



Kingsbury actively engages in research and practice to create leading-edge education and assessment of individuals with learning differences. Building on this foundation, Kingsbury educates children and adults with learning disabilities in a supportive environment of personalized teaching and instructs educational professionals in pedagogical practices.

<http://www.kingsbury.org/>

## Dissemination Partners



The IDEA Partnership is dedicated to improving outcomes for students and youth with disabilities through shared work and learning. The partnership reflects the collaborative work of more than 50 national organizations, technical assistance providers, and organizations and agencies at state and local levels.

<http://www.ideapartnership.org/>



The Vocational Evaluation and Career Assessment Professionals (VECAP) organization is committed to the advancement and improvement of vocational evaluation and career assessment services. It is founded on the belief that every individual has the right and the opportunity to participate in satisfying and appropriate employment that contributes to the enhancement of the individual's quality of life.

<http://www.vecap.org>



THE HSC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

**The HSC Foundation**

The HSC Foundation is dedicated to improving access to services for individuals who face social and health care barriers due to disability and chronic illness. The Foundation supports The HSC Pediatric Center, Health Services for Children with Special Needs, Inc., and HSC Home Care, LLC.

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