

# Transition Age Youth: High Expectations for Employment


March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Colorado Office of Employment First



COLORADO OFFICE OF  
**EMPLOYMENT FIRST**

— Work Elevated —



**Were you ever asked as a young  
adult- what do you want to be  
when you grow up??**



**In the “Transition” years we are always  
“Becoming”- taking steps on a journey to  
discover who we are.**





## Who We Are



**Jennifer Stewart, MPP**  
**Breaking Expectations LLC**  
**COEF Transition Contractor**



**Teresa Nguyen, MPH**  
**Curriculum**  
**Developer/Trainer - Youth**  
**and Families**



**Melanie Honsbruch, CPWIC**  
**Curriculum**  
**Developer/Trainer - Benefits**  
**Counseling**



## Who We Are

### Colorado Office of Employment First

Our vision...

A culture of inclusive, meaningful, and competitive employment for all people.

Our mission...

Leading Colorado toward equitable employment reaching all people with disabilities through –

- Collaboration
- Systems Innovation
- Training Excellence



# What is Employment First?

- A **belief & value** that all individuals regardless of level of disability are capable of full inclusion and working in Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE).
- CIE is the first and preferred outcome, **regardless of level of disability** in businesses found in the community, with regular compensation, equal advancement and equal interaction with non-disabled co-workers.
- Systems Change & **Culture Shift** efforts in state agency employment-related policies, service delivery practices, and alignment of service funding structures to increase CIE outcomes.



# Why is Employment First Important?

## National Core Indicators:

- Nearly 85% of individuals with significant disabilities are unemployed or underemployed.

## IPS Employment Center:

- 65% of individuals with significant mental illness want to work, only 2% have access to an evidenced based Supported Employment Program

**\*\*Employment is a Social Determinant of Health\*\***



# Employment Participation Among People with Disabilities

Disability Type	Participation Rate (%)
Cognitive Disability	15%
Mental Disability	25%
Any Disability	34%
No Disability	80%



# Colorado Office of Employment First

What you need to know....

1. Website and resources:

<https://employmentfirstcolorado.org/>

2. Social Media:

**Facebook:**

<https://www.facebook.com/COEFtalk>

**Instagram:** @coeftalk

3. **Save the Date!!**

COEF 1<sup>st</sup> Conference: June 9-11, 2021

**COLORADO OFFICE OF EMPLOYMENT FIRST**

The Colorado Office of Employment First (COEF) is a new training and technical assistance center housed at JFK Partners at the University of Colorado School of Medicine focused on improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities, including those with complex and significant disabilities.

COEF envisions a culture of inclusive, meaningful, and competitive employment for all people with disabilities.

**CONTACT US**

Colorado Office of Employment First  
[EMPLOYMENTFIRSTCOLORADO.ORG](https://employmentfirstcolorado.org)  
[info@employmentfirstcolorado.org](mailto:info@employmentfirstcolorado.org)

**IN COLLABORATION WITH**

Colorado Department of Education  
[www.cde.state.co.us](http://www.cde.state.co.us)

**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation  
[www.colorado.gov/dvr](http://www.colorado.gov/dvr)

**COLORADO**  
Department of Labor and Employment  
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

**JFK Partners**  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO  
ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

**WORK ELEVATED.**

A series of brochures focused on preparing young adults for employment developed in collaboration by the Colorado Office of Employment First, Department of Education, and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

**SAVE THE DATE**

June 9th, 10th, and 11th

**Building Leaders in Employment First**  
Conference 2021

# Employment as a Social Determinant of Health



<https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health>

# Employment as a Social Determinant of Health

- Unemployment can have negative health consequences. Those who are unemployed report feelings of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and demoralization. Unemployed individuals tend to suffer more from stress-related illnesses such as high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack, heart disease, and arthritis.
- Job benefits such as health insurance, paid sick leave, and parental leave can affect the health of employed individuals.
- Periods of economic recession are possibly associated with higher prevalence of mental health and substance use disorders, and other physical health concerns.
  - Employment is a protective factor (SAMHSA, 2020)



# Employment as a Social Determinant of Health

- Engaging in employment can reduce healthcare costs
  - Medicaid health costs reduced by \$161 per member, per month when members were engaged in an employment support program (Momany, Schartz, Nguyen, Carter, & Strong, 2012).
- Employment to achieve greater **health equity** for people with disabilities.
- Many employment supports are available through federal and state programs, including Medicaid waivers.



# Who We Are



Looking at TRANSITION....



Lens of EMPLOYMENT...  
EMPLOYMENT is the  
first and preferred  
outcome....





# Today's Agenda



- What is Transition?
- High Expectations
- Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Benefits Counseling
- Community Connections and Partnerships





# WHAT IS TRANSITION?



# What is Transition?

- A plan for life after high school
- A process before and during high school to gain skills and experiences to prepare for life after high school
- A time to practice self-determination and discover interests, strengths and areas of needed support



# What is Transition?

## Who is responsible for “transition”?

- A process occurring throughout a young adult's high school years (less than 14- age 24)
- There are school transition services at age 15 if on an IEP
- There are pre-employment transition services at age 15 through DVR
- There is family support throughout a lifetime to encourage self-determination and independence
- There are Medicaid waivers if eligible
- There are medical teams that support young adult's safety and health





**THERE IS NOT ONE PLAN OR  
ONE PERSON RESPONSIBLE  
FOR TRANSITION PLANNING**





# What is Transition?

## Importance of Family

What is their role?

- Facilitators
- Skill Builders
- Networkers
- Organizers
- Supporting their child's vision
- Supporting their child's self-determination





# HIGH EXPECTATIONS



# High Expectations

*“The best predictor of post school outcomes are the following:*

- Parental Expectations*
- Teachers’ Expectations*

*Expectations change the path of what experiences are made available and what is taught to the child/student....”*

- Erik Carter, Ph.D. Vanderbilt University



# High Expectations



## Having Early Discussions:

- Starting in elementary school parents and teachers need to start discussing employment as a goal
- In middle school discuss chores at home and start to discuss potential work experiences
- Beginning of high school discuss with families benefits planning, services beyond high school, and employment



# High Expectations



## Establishing Practices to Promote Self-Determination

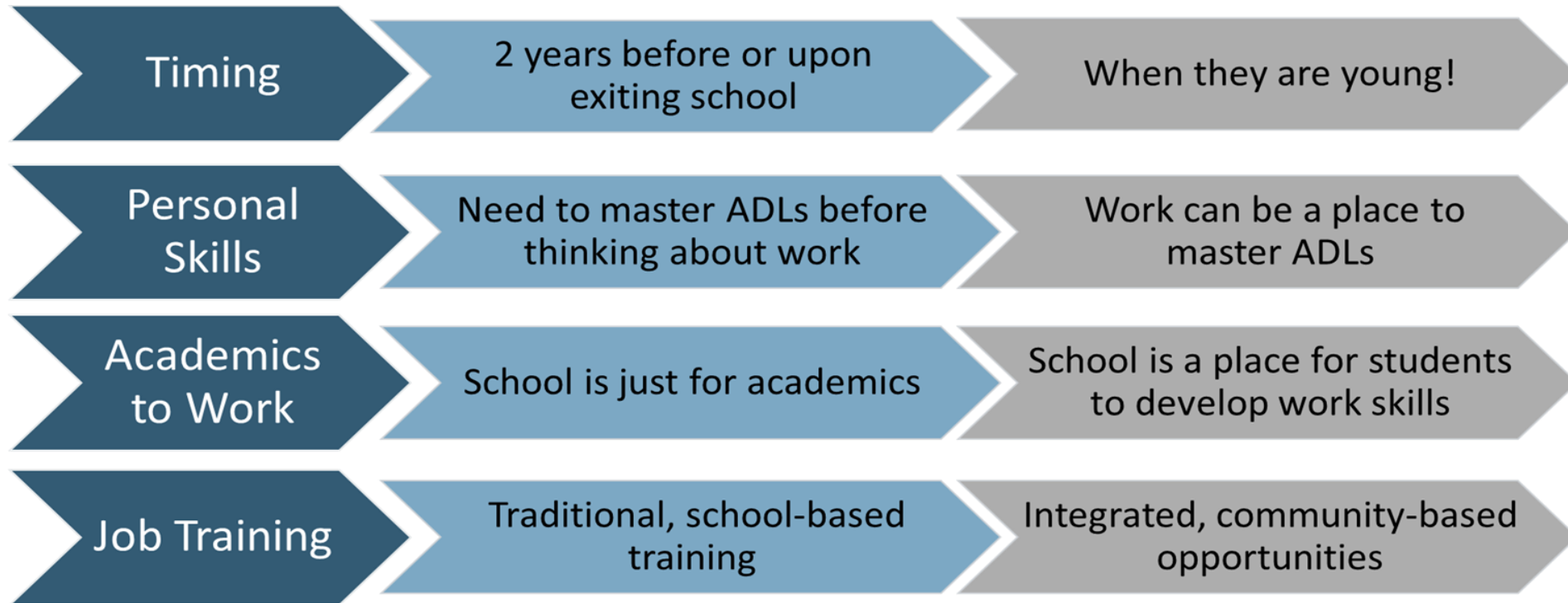
- Fade supports/supervision to allow for more independence
- Instruction in the community is specific to skill development, not field trips (e.g. crossing parking lots/streets) with the goal of independence
- Provide person centered planning meeting during transition to high school





# High Expectations

## Shifting our Thinking





# PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

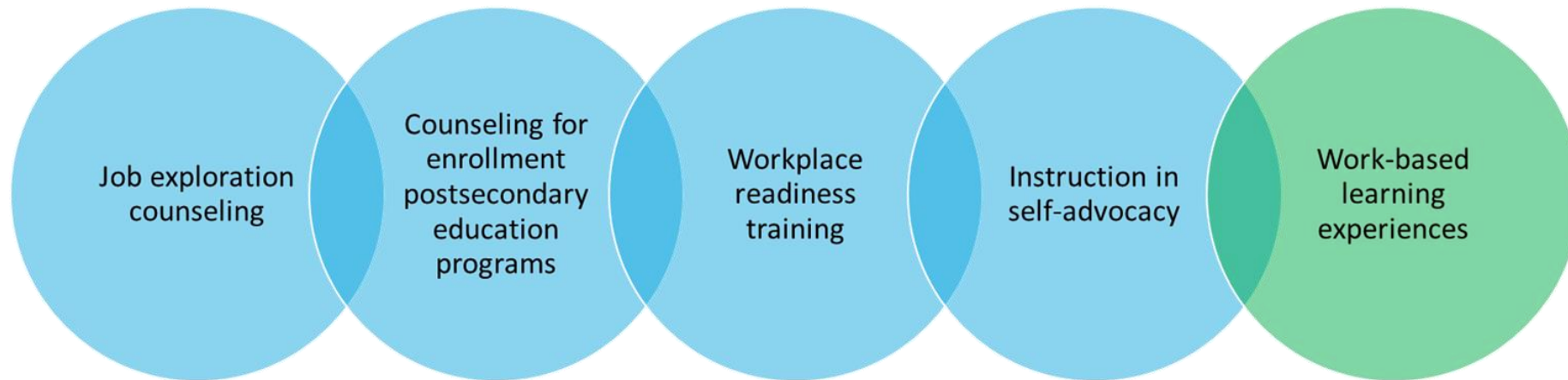


# Pre-Employment Transition Services

- Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA)
- Pre-ETS goal: increasing awareness to post-secondary employment and education options
  - “Light Touch”- Awareness, Preparation, Exploration
- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
  - Allocate 15% of budget
- Who is it for?
  - Students with disabilities
  - Potentially eligible for VR and eligible for VR
  - In high school or post secondary education



# Pre-Employment Transition Services



# Pre-Employment Transition Services



WIOA- Changed the way we think about employment for young adults

- Younger focus
- Focus on preparation- soft skills
- Coordination with schools and families is essential
- Academics vs. Employment- Not one or the other- BOTH







# BENEFITS COUNSELING



# What is Benefits Counseling?

Benefits Counseling (aka Benefits Planning) is a service that helps individuals with disabilities and their families understand how employment and other life decisions will impact their benefits.

## Examples of Benefits.....

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

SNAP (Food Stamps)

Medicare

Medicaid (ALL different kinds!)

And MORE.....



# Why Benefits?      Why Benefits Counseling?

- Benefits often provide basic needs like food, clothing, shelter
  - SSI and SSDI provide monthly cash payments AND access to health insurance
- Benefits mean economic stability as well as mental and physical well-being
- Medicaid Waivers provide specialized services and benefits that promote individuals with disabilities living integrated in their communities.



# Why Work? Why Benefits Counseling?

BECAUSE WORK.....

.....whether paid or unpaid, is good for our health and well being!



Work contributes to:

**Happiness**

**Confidence**

**Self Esteem**

**Bank Accounts**



# Why Benefits Counseling?

Benefits Counseling provides a clear, personalized plan



- plan addresses the fears and concerns individuals and their support systems may have about a reduction or loss of benefits if they work or make other life decisions
- provides individuals and their families the opportunity to make informed choice in their pursuit of employment and education



# How Does Benefits Counseling Help?

- ▶ Verification of benefits
- ▶ Long term support as need is determined
- ▶ Assistance understanding complicated benefit scenarios
- ▶ How work goals affect each benefit and how earnings influence the full picture
- ▶ Wage reporting responsibilities



# How can YOU help a Benefits Counselor?

- ▶ Copies of benefit verifications from the source
- ▶ Creating a team approach to what might be a scary endeavor
  - Involve your service providers, your parent, sibling, your TEAM
- ▶ Write down questions that can help YOU understand and YOUR son, daughter, and job seeker understand
- ▶ Developing an organizational system for paperwork that promotes success
- ▶ Be Open and Honest, and Ask Questions!



# Conversations with Your Benefits Counselor

- ▶ How will employment affect SSI, SSDI, food stamps, etc. now, What does that look like in the future?
- ▶ What happens to a child's benefit when a parent retires, becomes disabled or passes away?
- ▶ Can I work part time, full time? Can I go to school *before* I go to work?
- ▶ What happens to my Social Security benefits when I turn 18?





# When to Pursue Benefits Counseling

*IF EMPLOYMENT IS PART OF THE CONVERSATION.....*

- *Transition Age Students age 14-24*
- *Before seeking education or employment*
  - *While searching for work*
  - *Upon finding work*
- *Currently working and changes occur*

*BENEFITS COUNSELING SHOULD BE A PART OF THE CONVERSATION.....*



# Just Remember!

## You Don't Have To Navigate Benefits and Work Alone!

You know.....

- ☐ .....what benefits counseling is.....
- ☐ .....how benefits counseling can help.....
- ☐ .....how to access benefits counseling.....

And most important.....

## RESOURCES!



# Benefits Counseling Guide



## A Benefits Counseling Guide

*"When to Obtain Benefits Counseling Services"*

1

### What are Benefits?

Benefits are government funded programs that are provided to people based on a characteristic such as disability or financial need. Examples of benefits include:

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
- Local/Public assistance benefits (e.g. Energy Assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Aid to Needy Disabled (AND), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/food stamps)
- Housing assistance
- Health insurance (e.g. Medicaid/Medicare)
- Other assistance

### What is Benefits Counseling?

Benefits counseling is a service that helps individuals with disabilities and their families understand how Employment and other life decisions will impact their benefits.

Benefits counseling provides a clear, personalized plan to educate individuals with disabilities and their families that, in general, you will not immediately lose your cash benefits and health insurance if you work.

Benefits counseling addresses the fears and concerns many individuals and their families have about a reduction in benefits if they start work.

Benefits counseling helps each individual understand:

- What benefits the individual receives and why
- The work incentives available when they go to work
- How earned income impacts cash benefits, public assistance, and health insurance
- Reporting requirements for each benefit and public assistance program
- How to save money and build assets for self-sufficiency (e.g. Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts)

### When to Seek a Qualified Benefit Counselor's Assistance?

- Prior to seeking employment/education
- While conducting a job search
- When working with a Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Counselor
- Upon obtaining employment
- Currently working and if changes occur while working
- Transition-age students (ages 14-24)
- ANYTIME employment is being considered!!

For more information, contact the Colorado Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) at [coloradoapse@email.com](mailto:coloradoapse@email.com)

Last Revision: 04/05/19

Identifies certified benefits  
counselors  
in Colorado

<https://employmentfirstcolorado.org/benefits-counseling/>



COLORADO OFFICE OF  
EMPLOYMENT FIRST  
— Work Elevated —

# Future Resource.....Current Opportunities!

## DB101

### Web Based Employment Resource and Estimator Tool

- 24/7/365 access to explore the world of work and benefits
- Public rollout **COMING EARLY SUMMER 2021!!**
  - Statewide promotional and educational trainings available!
  - Train the Trainer!
    - Interested? Contact COEF Today!

[www.db101.org](http://www.db101.org)





# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS



# Community Connections and Partnerships



What happens when...

- The school door closes that last day
- The bus pulls away on the last day of school
- The day after school...

Think about...What are they transitioning to?



# Community Connections and Partnerships

## Turning 18 Checklist

- ☐ Decision Making
- ☐ Apply for SSI
- ☐ Apply for Medicaid and / or Medicaid Buy In
- ☐ Apply for Section 8 Housing
- ☐ Register to Vote
- ☐ Obtain Colorado ID
- ☐ If Male, Register for Selective Service
- ☐ Under Colorado law, parents maintain those rights defined in IDEA for special education students who remain in public education until the age of 21.



# Community Connections and Partnerships

## Other Considerations:

- Adult Services including Employment
- Postsecondary Options
- Travel
- Housing
- Managing Benefits
- Health and Medical Care
- Financial Planning





# Community Connections and Partnerships



## Employment Options:

- DVR- Job assistance and placement services
- Apprenticeship
- Supported employment
- Customized employment
- Self-Employment
- Ongoing Education/training





# WRAP UP



## Wrap up



Transition Planning  
+  
High Expectations  
+  
Pre-employment Transition Services  
=  
Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)



# Wrap up



## Transition Planning to Achieve Employment First

- 1) Person centered vision
- 2) Pre-employment transition services
- 3) Work based learning experiences
- 4) Benefits counseling
- 5) Paid employment
- 6) Connection to adult agencies before leaving high school
- 7) Community safety and access
- 8) Employment in a career pathway





# Thank you! Questions?

<https://employmentfirstcolorado.org/>



# Engage With Us!



Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/COEFtalk>



Instagram: [@coeftalk](https://www.instagram.com/coeftalk)



[www.employmentfirstcolorado.org](http://www.employmentfirstcolorado.org)

★ Newsletter and Listserv

[info@employmentfirstcolorado.org](mailto:info@employmentfirstcolorado.org)

303-318-8574 Phone



COLORADO OFFICE OF  
**EMPLOYMENT FIRST**  
— Work Elevated —

# **SAVE THE DATE**

June 9th, 10th, and 11th



## **Building Leaders in Employment First**

**Conference 2021**



**COLORADO OFFICE OF  
EMPLOYMENT FIRST**

— *Work Elevated* —

# Presenter Team



**Jennifer Stewart, MPP**

[breakingexpectationsllc@gmail.com](mailto:breakingexpectationsllc@gmail.com)

Phone: 303-900-7835

**Melanie Honsbruch, CPWIC**

[melanie.honsbruch@state.co.us](mailto:melanie.honsbruch@state.co.us)

Phone: 303-929-2129

**Teresa Nguyen, MPH**

[teresa.nguyen@state.co.us](mailto:teresa.nguyen@state.co.us)

Phone: 303-981-1236

