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Model Transition Process for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Youth

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MODEL TRANSITION PROCESS FOR DEAF AND HARD-OF-HEARING YOUTH

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Abstract

This paper reports the results of Tucson, Arizona's Community Outreach Program for the Deaf Transition Project for Hearing-Impaired Youth. The project is funded through the Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services project, and has as its primary goals:

1. To develop a predictable referral system: school to adult services.
2. To develop specialized transition methods for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.
3. To develop techniques to train in life management and employment related skills.
4. To create systems change.

This paper will propose a model for transitional planning and recommend system changes which could facilitate such planning and service delivery.

Program Implementation

Federal policy, state laws, or intergovernmental and cooperative agreements create the framework for developing and implementing transition programs.

The unspoken assumption is that everything in the student's life up to transition planning and exit from school will have prepared him/her for "entry level adulthood," both in vocational and non-vocational areas.

As the student exits from high school, society expects that the student will:

A. Internally and externally move into adulthood.

B. Function in adulthood, moving from dependence to interdependence.

C. Develop an identity, ownership, and responsibility for his/her adult life.

Has this occurred? According to a National Longitudinal Transition Study, (Wagner, 1989), transitioning is not happening as well as assumed. A follow-up study of non-multihandicapped deaf students two years after graduation found that 16% were not involved in any productive activity and, in effect, were sitting at home. Most exiting students (38%) were in postsecondary training (7% vocational programs, 19% 2-year college, 15% 4-year college). Some students were working part-time (14%), and 24% were working full-time.

Why has transition planning been unsuccessful for 16% of the deaf population? There are four possible explanations. The first looks at the traditional planning methods. The student exiting high school comes in contact with a variety of adults, all who have a transition plan

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in mind for the student. Seldom does the transition plan developed by the school, Vocational Rehabilitation, or parent mirror those of the student. If a plan is formally or informally agreed upon by the student and each adult, the result is often a variety of plans either conflicting or duplicating the transition efforts of each other and reflecting adult wishes for the student. With no clear, united plan, the student is left to piece together his/her own passage and can overlook important aspects needed for a successful transition.

The second explanation focuses on vocational outcomes. Employment is a containable, countable, definable, and obvious measure. Securing work shows successful transition. However, working comprises only one-third of a person's day. The remaining two-thirds involve adult living skills, recreational choices, and community access and involvement. These are skills an individual continually learns throughout life and are skills which impact work performance. Not attending to the development of these skills leaves a gap in the student's functional knowledge.

A third explanation looks at the preparation of the student for movement into adult life. Schools and parents concentrate on preparing the student for the *content* needed. How much, and what kind of, math, science, civics, and English will be needed to become an adult? Attention in content areas leave little time for preparation in the *process* of how the world works.

The fourth explanation is that adults overlook the developmental stage or values from which the student operates. Looking at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962), students in transition need to resolve the physiological needs of housing, income, and food before attending to higher level needs. They must resolve safety and security issues before attending to community involvement or interdependence. Resolution of these needs takes time and is a very individual process. Imposing time limits and dictating outcomes for

students are counter productive to a successful, student-owned transition process.

Divergent, vocationally-driven student plans in which attention to the students' development levels and process/incidental knowledge is overlooked have not built the skills necessary to bridge school and adult environments. The student is left to recognize that there is a difference, figure out what it is, and determine what is expected from him or her. Some of the most obvious differences are:

SCHOOL HOME/DORM	WORK/COLLEGE APARTMENT
Needs are anticipated and provided for.	Must identify own needs, solutions, and resolutions.
Services are centralized and available.	Services are scattered and not immediate.
Learning environment is fairly controlled.	Learning environment is uncontrolled, is tested and personalized.
Often shielded from direct experience of consequences.	Consequences are fully and experienced.
Adults are primarily decision makers and in charge.	Self is primary decision maker - responsibility is expected.
Rules are predictable and clear - compliance is encouraged.	Rules are numerous and unknown - compliance is expected.

The student needs assistance to build the skills necessary to bridge these two environments. Both school and vocational rehabilitation must play a key role in this transition. Part of the impact of the separation between education and rehabilitation can be seen in the contrasts in the values structures of these systems. Lizanne DiStefano of the Transition Institute identified these contrasts:

SPECIAL EDUCATION	REHABILITATION
Assimilation	Employment
Integration	Cost Reduction
Maximum Potential	Entry Level Employment
Equality	Employment Potential
Entitlement	Eligibility
Personal Independence	Financial Self-Support

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Although one could argue that these values are not universally shared, the conflict between any two of them, eligibility-based versus entitlement based decision making, for example, is significant enough to create difficulties when the two systems are required to interact as they are in the transition of students.

Another observation which is pertinent prior to a discussion of the Arizona Transition Project is that the student in transition operates in significant contrast to the educational and rehabilitation system. This can be demonstrated in contrasting the goals of the individual versus the system.

SYSTEM	INDIVIDUAL
Service Continuity	Reject Prior Roles
Gainful Employment	Experiment with Options
Independent Living	Understand Lifestyles
System Responsibility	Personal Responsibility

While the system is busy attempting to assure that the student is in a situation which will result in long-term decision making and a sense of permanence about the post-high school year, the student is busy "trying out" and experimenting with new-found options. This aspect will be discussed more in depth, and is noted here to set the stage for the approach to transition used by the Arizona Transition Project.

Project Summary: Challenges and Techniques

The Project was completed in September of 1990 as a three-year demonstration grant funded by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (Project #1281H70192, Grant #G008745356). The primary goals of the project were:

1. To develop a predictable referral and "case management" system from school to the adult service system.

Clients involved students from residential or specialized schools for the Deaf as well as public schools. The primary adult service system was Vocational Rehabilitation with support and involvement in this role from the community service agency of the deaf and hard of hearing. A significant challenge to the project was simply finding the students in a geographically large and rural state. The involvement of the State Coordinator of Service for the Deaf (a position within Rehabilitation Services with statewide responsibilities) to maintain a student identification process is central to the success of transition for students outside the three metropolitan areas of the state.

2. To develop a means to assist schools with transition planning for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The area of student planning proved to be a major task because of the need to reconcile the system expectations of education and rehabilitation as well as the student and the family. The process began looking like Figure 1 which is a fairly accurate representation of the method used to develop plans for providing transition services. In this plan, a process which included outreach and case-finding through a comprehensive service program was the goal for all students.

3. To develop techniques to assist students in acquiring life management and employment-related skills.

To accomplish this goal, a service delivery flow was developed which is demonstrated in Figure 2. In an effort to assure that all aspects of the student's life are considered at the planning stage, the service components are listed in general categories. The project did not accept all referrals for services. In a sense, it was an "eligibility"-based system. Deaf and hard-of-hearing students who are eligible for life-long support from agencies such as Developmental Disabilities in the state of Arizona were not generally served. Because of limited resources and limited time, it was necessary

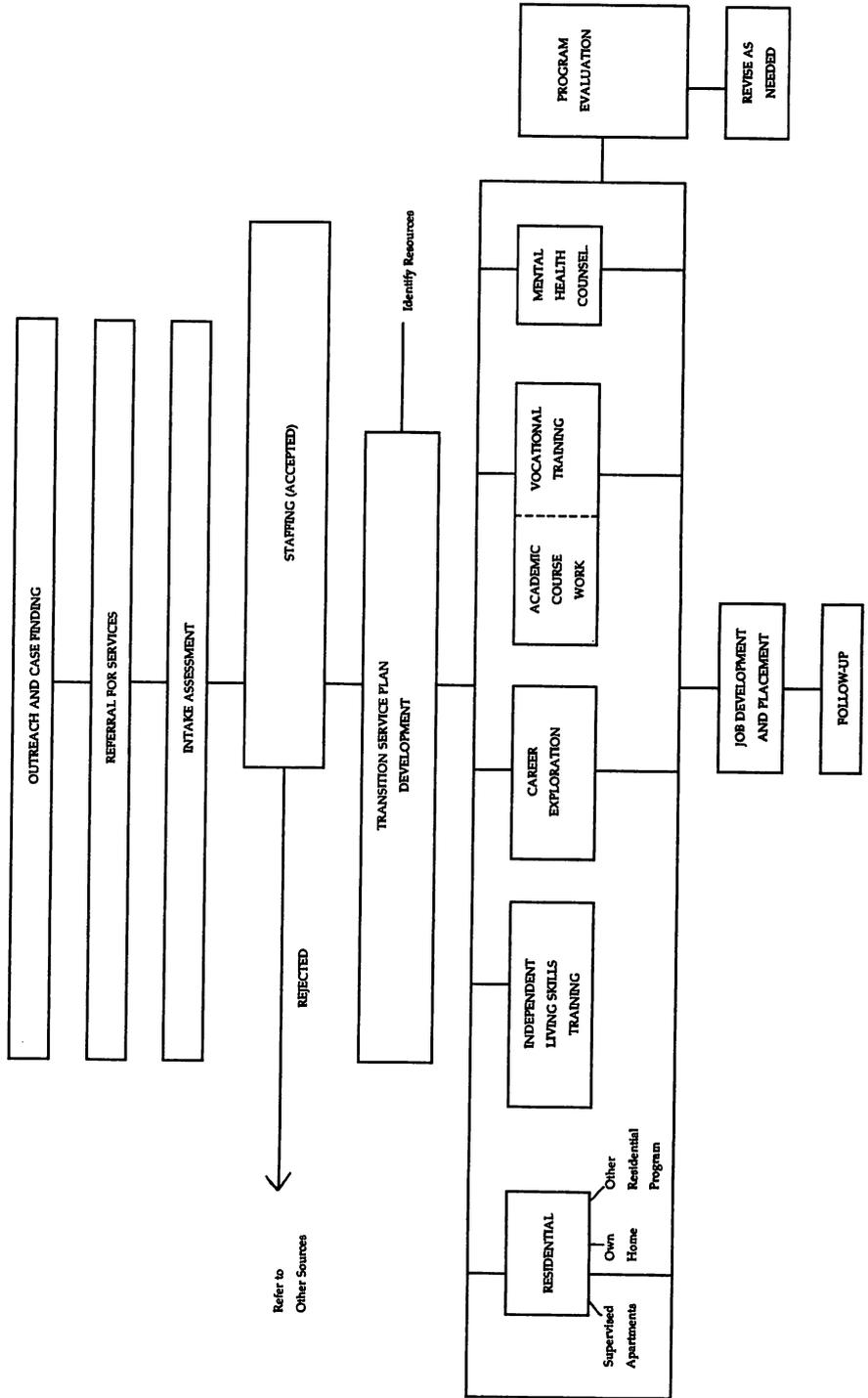**Vol. 26   No. 1   Summer 1992**   **3**

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FIGURE 1
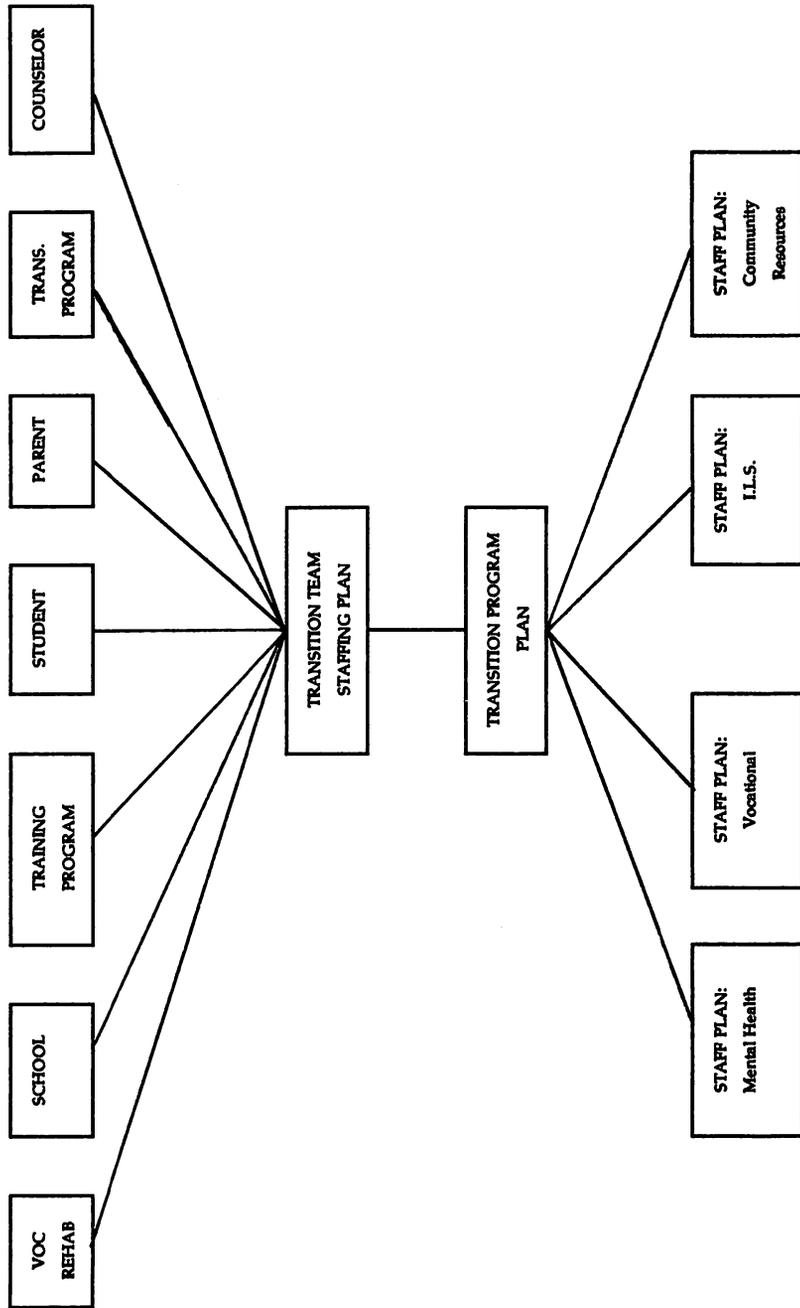
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FIGURE 2

CLIENT SERVICE PROGRAM

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to place some restrictions on the persons served. Since transition services are most critical for persons who have no entitlement or life-long support, a decision was made to concentrate on that group of deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

4. To create systems change through the use of memoranda of understanding and coordination on behalf of deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

The history of intergovernmental agreements between Special Education, Vocational Education, and Rehabilitation Services in Arizona extends back to 1983 when a VESPERS agreement was drafted which defined roles of each agency in relation to their service responsibilities. Additional agreements were drafted which created financial arrangements between school districts and specialized schools with Vocational Rehabilitation. These were not adequate to assure that roles and responsibilities of individual staff were assigned so that the process would work for the student. The memoranda of understanding filled this gap as they were developed by the individuals most likely to participate on the transition teams and those who would be primarily responsible for operationalizing transition plans.

From the three-year project model, systems outcomes were identified in two general areas: administrative outcomes related to inter-agency collaboration and the development of a holistic approach with a student-centered philosophy of transition services.

From the Administrative perspective, the model process includes:

1. Development of formal intergovernmental agreements and memoranda of understanding which detail:

    Purpose of the Agreement

    Roles and Responsibilities of Each Party

    Nature of Service Relationship Between the Parties

    Student Status During Transition in Each System

    Direct Services Provided

    Administrative Concerns

    Attachments (e.g., Role of the Family)

    Signatures

2. Identification of the responsible individual in the adult services system who will track students as they exit secondary and, in some cases, post-secondary programs.

3. Identification of a school-based individual who is responsible to assure that transition plans are developed for all students.

4. The implementation of a process which assures that holistic planning which reflects the student perspective is the core of the transition of the student from school to adult life.

The Arizona Transition Project next developed a planning process which was team oriented and holistic, including non-vocational as well as vocational tasks and outcomes. The process reflects the student-as-architect perspective, not students as the center for adult activity.

The initial planning process developed by the project had four steps. Transition staff would conduct an ecological-type interview with the student to determine his/her support systems, direction, likes and dislikes, experiences, view of self and the world. From the interview, significant others were identified to become part of the transition team. Next, staff would collect goals and steps from each team member, including the student, and summarize them into one plan. Next a team meeting was held in which the goals were discussed, refined, and prioritized. This process was modeled after the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process.

Figure 3 is an example of a transition plan for Jane, a 19-year-old deaf student. Jane has slight cerebral palsy, reads at a 2.1 grade level, had a 3.5 grade equivalency in math, had no public bus experience, no adult or independent living experiences, and, most importantly to her, Jane was in love. Jane's transition team included 15

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FIGURE 3

TRANSITION TEAM PLANNING

DRAFT

GOALS	ASPECTS	LISTED BY
1. Practice independent living skills in apartment	1a. Practice responsible banking and budgeting (savings and checking)	1a. School, Transition Program, VR
	b. Establish spending plan - Id bills and income - Develop budget - Use budget and plan	b. School, Transition Program, VR, Jane
	c. Learn comparison shopping	c. Transition Program, School
	d. Practice food shopping and preparation	d. Transition Program, School, Jane
	e. Learn bus system	e. Transition Program, School, VR
	f. Learn where community resources are and how to use them	f. Transition Program, School, VR
	g. Learn how to problem solve	g. School
2. Locate independent housing.	2a. Identify sites	2a. Jane, Transition Program, VR
	b. Develop budget for moving	b. Transition Program, VR
	c. Identify a roommate	c. Transition Program, VR
	d. Move in	d. Jane, Transition Program, VR
	e. Follow up as needed	e. Transition Program, VR
3. Learn independent and responsible behavior.	3a. Seek personal counseling for developing independence away from family and self-esteem	3a. School
	b. Learn and practice safe sex	b. Transition Program, School
	c. Become aware of the responsibilities and meaning of dating and marriage	c. School
4. Obtain gainful employment.	4a. Identify interests and sites for visit	4a. VR, School, Transition Program
	b. Pick one area for focus	b. VR, School, Transition Program
	c. Learn employability skills	c. VR, School, Transition Program
	d. Participate in job development	d. VR, School, Transition Program
	e. Placement and follow-up as needed	e. Jane, VR, School, Transition Program
5. Develop an awareness of community and resources.	5a. Learn how to get and use interpreters	5a. Transition Program
	b. Learn where to go for assistance	b. School, Transition Program
	c. Learn what to do for emergencies	c. Transition Program, School
	d. Learn what to do for leisure activities	d. Transition Program, School
	e. Get ID, new SSI address, relay, TDD	e. Transition Program

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adults who believed they were important to her transition efforts.

The plan, as developed, actually has a good content, but is a bad plan. Looking at the language level, it is obviously written from an adult perspective, not Jane's, who reads at the 2nd grade level. It reflects adult values for her, their perception of what will be needed for her to be a successful, interdependent adult—especially Goals 1 & 3. The plan includes activities beyond Jane's functional level, such as comparison shop or develop a budget. These aspects rely on math beyond 3.5 grade level, and predicting skills that Jane has not yet developed. The plan does not offer choices to Jane, no goals were eliminated or altered, and, therefore, it does not reflect relevancy for Jane and her environment. The plan looks like a 5-year plan. To Jane, emerging into an independent phase of life, that means 5 years of adult involvement in her life and activities—not a pleasant nor welcomed idea.

Jane remained with the transition project for 4 months and then left. Before leaving, she was asked to list what goals she had wanted. Figure 4 is the transition plan Jane developed for herself and represents the skills and activities she sought to improve. The plan is simple, to the point, not overwhelming but practical and achievable.

Jane stayed in the program to learn what she wanted, not what adults wanted for her. The team plan model overwhelmed and excluded Jane from the partnership. The IEP model did not work.

Transition staff recognized that the initial model for planning reflected external values and perceptions of student needs. The model illustrated adult reality and not student reality. To become aware of the students' reality, team members developed a values ranking activity to compare staff, and student values. The list of values, represented by common items, was developed. The items included were: car keys, TV guide, aspirin, tree, Bible, valentine, truth drug, gun, dollar bill, encyclopedia, and Declaration of Independence. Each participant was asked to discuss what each object means to them and then asked to rank order each value.

The top three choices of students were 1) Dollar Bill, 2) Car Keys, and 3) Declaration of Independence. Their choices represented tangible, here-and-now, basic values relating to SELF. The top three choices of staff were 1) Valentine, 2) Tree, and 3) Encyclopedia. These choices related to belonging, esteem, interdependence issues, or seeing self as ONE of MANY. Certainly, these are important values, but they are not relevant or useful guides to newly transitioning students.

Transitioning staff revised the plan-building process to train students to become more active and involved so that their translation plan would be more reflective of their values and needs. The ecological interview was still conducted, as was identifying team members, collecting their input, and compiling a draft plan. At this point, a meeting was held with the student to go over the Draft Plan, explain any of the jargon or goals, assist in selecting desired goals and aspects, and to rehearse participation in the team staffing. After the rehearsal, a team staffing was held and 3-4 goals were selected for focus for the next 6-8 months.

Figure 5 lists the transition of John, a 19-year-old deaf Hispanic student. John has a 3.5 grade equivalency in reading and a 7.5 grade equivalency in math. The plan is written from his perspective in his language.

Prior to the staffing, the Draft Plan was shared with John and goals and aspects reviewed. Transition Project staff worked with John on articulating his reasons for attending college, predicting the adult team members' points of view, and addressing those concerns. Figure 6 is the actual Transition Team Plan developed by John and his team. John successfully negotiated attending college for one semester and, depending on his progress, future semesters as well.

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FIGURE 4
TRANSITION TEAM PLANNING
DRAFT

GOALS	ASPECTS	LISTED BY
1. Practice independent living in apartment	1. Handle own money Buy own food Friends visit any time Get TDD	Jane - 9/88
2. Find own apartment	2. Find right place Own responsible Own rules	
3. Find good job	3. Earn more than $3.35 Daytime work Food Service Some responsible	

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FIGURE 5
TRANSITION TEAM PLANNING
DRAFT

GOALS	ASPECTS	LISTED BY
1. Live in own apartment	1a. Private space b. Do own cooking c. Buy TV and decoder	1. John
2. Be responsible for myself	2a. Have own money control b. Make own rules for apartment c. Take care of own time	2. John
3. Find full-time job	3a. Day hours, no weekends b. $5.00/hr. c. Move around job, not sit d. Nice boss	3. John
4. Buy motorcycle	4a. Big engine b. Good condition	4. John
5. Go to college	5a. Take math b. Improve reading and English c. Join sports d. Join auto class	5. John

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FIGURE 6
TRANSITION TEAM PLANNING
DRAFT

GOALS	ASPECTS		LISTED BY
1. Practice independent living skills	1a.	Transition apartments for training	1a. School, VR, John
	b.	Learn budgeting, banking, bill paying	b. School, VR
	c.	Learn money management system	c. John, Transition Program
	d.	Meal planning and cooking practice	d. School, VR, dorm staff
	e.	Getting along with roommate	e. Transition Program
	f.	Figure out transportation (motorcycle)	f. John, VR, School, Transition Program
	g.	Buy TV and decoder	g. John
2. Maintain own apartment	2a.	Find own private space	2a. John, VR, Transition Program
	b.	Moving out budget for new apartment	b. Transition Program
	c.	Training for clarification of leases, insurance, rights	c. Transition Program
	d.	Follow-up contact as needed	d. Transition Program, VR, School
3. Go to college	3a.	Take math	3a. John
	b.	Improve reading and English	b. John
	c.	Join sports	c. John
	d.	Join auto class	d. John
4. Find full-time employment	a.	Career exploration	4a. School, VR, COPD, Cnslr., Transition Program
	b.	Employability skill training	b. School, VR, Transition Program, COPD
	c.	Participate in job search	c. John, School, Transition Program, VR, COPD
	d.	Placement	d. John, Transition Program, VR, COPD
	e.	Coaching and follow-up as needed	e. School, VR, COPD, Transition Program
5. Learn how to use an interpreter	5a.	Learn interpreter role	5a. Transition Program
	b.	Awareness of code of ethics	b. Transition Program
	c.	Practice using an interpreter	c. Transition Program
	d.	Arrange for own interpreter	d. Transition Program, COPD, VR
6. Learn about community resources	6a.	Obtain ID	6a. Transition Program
	b.	Id community assistance agencies (COPD, SSI, Counselors, Relay, etc.)	b. School, VR, COPD, Transition Program
	c.	Learn about leisure options	c. Transition Program, Counselor
	d.	Learn what to do for emergency situations	d. Transition Program, School

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Conclusion

A number of program and planning recommendations for schools and agencies engaged in transition activities were a result of this project experience. The following summarize the findings from our experience in Arizona:

1. Transition is contiguous with adolescenct developmental period. It is also an individual experience. Develop an understanding of the adolescent perspective.

2. Approach transition planning as a mentor or advocate, not as a director. Let students try things, let them fail, and let the successes by their successes.

3. Transition is not a neat, tidy, or timely event. Provide a balance of supports and challenging activities, not challenges alone. Allow students time for the process.

4. Expect the unexpected. Often life will happen while you are making other plans. Address what occurs.

By promoting student involvement in decisions and experiences, positive completion of transition plans will be enhanced and students will be exposed to and learn skills needed in adult life.

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