NTACT THE COLLABORATIVE | National Technical Assistance Center on Transition

Implementing Effective Practices to Deliver Transition Services: Improving Outcomes in Rural Communities in Arkansas and Virginia

Interagency collaboration is a predictor of post-school success (Mazzotti et al., 2021). But, how do multiple youth serving agencies (including schools) and multiple departments within schools collaborate? Initially two technical assistance centers, funded separately by the Office of Special Education Programs and the Rehabilitation Services Administration set out to support the implementation of effective collaboration practices in two states. NTACT:C continues to provide TA as state agencies scale-up these practices in more communities.

What Is CIRCLES?

Communicating Interagency Relationships and Collaborative Linkages for Exceptional Students (CIRCLES; https://circles.charlotte.edu/) is a research-based collaborative service delivery model (https://transitionta.org/effective-practices/pd-circles-to-increase-self-determination/) designed to guide schools in implementing interagency collaboration across three teams:

- Community-Level Team
- School-Level Team
- Individualized Education Program (IEP) team

What is IRT?

An Integrated Resource Team (IRT; https://projecte3.com/integrated-resource-teams/) is a customer-centered partnership between an individual jobseeker with a disability and diverse service systems

- It is a federally recognized promising practice for improving employment outcomes
- A Disability Resource Coordinator or other service provider may support the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) eligible customer/ jobseeker
    - Approaching service providers to discuss and develop an employment plan
    - Service providers coordinate services and leverage funding to give the job-seeker comprehensive, wrap-around services tailored to their unique needs

- It is a person-driven planning approach

What is CIRCLES implementation in Arkansas with NTACT and NTACT:C?

Arkansas pursued intensive TA support from NTACT, with a goal of building collaborative partnerships across Arkansas Department Education, Arkansas Rehabilitative Services, and Arkansas Career and Technical Education at the state level, which would then serve as a model at the local level

- TA providers co-facilitated quarterly Core Team Meetings to:
  - Build and maintain collaborative partnerships at the state level
  - Deliver professional development at the local level to interagency teams of special education, VR, and CTE
    - Train local districts
    - Facilitate meetings focused on access of students with disabilities in CTE
    - Implement CIRCLES in four pilot districts (i.e., Harrisburg, Magnolia, Rogers, Whitehall), including training, coaching, evaluation and increased support by state and regional personnel for local districts (rather than TA Center staff)
- Arkansas continued to receive TA from NTACT:C, focused on scaling-up the research-based practice of CIRCLES
- TA providers advise and support in planning and evaluation
- Long-term goals include:
  - Effective comprehensive system of support in place to support students with disabilities across multiple agencies
  - Increased number of students with disabilities gaining paid employment/ work experience in high school
  - Increased number of students with disabilities, including students with low-incidence disabilities, participating in post-school employment
  - Increased number of students with disabilities accessing, attending, and participating in postsecondary education and training

What is IRT in Virginia with Targeted Communities, Disability Innovation Funds, and NTACT:C?

Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (VA DARS) proposed to increase outreach, engagement, and successful completion of the VR process for individuals with disabilities who were living at or below the poverty level and experiencing substance use disorder and/or serious mental illness

- These populations are widely under-served when compared with demographic data in the two communities that were identified to participate
- TA was provided by Project Educate, Empower, and Employ (Project E3; RSA funded) and focused on:
  - Development and strengthening of partnerships and the establishment of local area multi-stakeholder advisory councils to identify needs

  - Delivery of professional development for VR and community-based agencies (e.g., intersection between disability and poverty, impact of poverty for participation in programming, motivational interviewing)
- TA providers facilitated local onsite advisory council meetings, delivered trainings, and/or convened regular virtual meetings
- VR agency staff, non-profit staff, volunteer/faith-based networks, and local government organizations participated in these trainings, which resulted in the formation of an informal learning community and strengthened cross-agency relationships
- The TA team facilitated an event called Community Academy
  - The Community Academy format provides every entity with time to share who they are, the services they provide, and the outcomes their entity is seeking to achieve relative to the services they provide
- After the Community Academy, the TA Team worked with VA DARS VR counselors to identify participants who could benefit from the IRT approach and then supported them through implementation via modeling
- TA Team provided ongoing coaching and consultation for VR counselors as they began initiating IRT with additional participants
- Seeing the benefits, VA DARS applied and received a Disability Innovation Fund - Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment Innovative Model Demonstration grant in 2022, centered on IRT implementation
- VA DARS receives support from NTACT:C staff in ongoing implementation of the IRT model in specific communities as the primary focus of this new grant, expanding to additional rural communities in the State

Outcomes to Date

- CIRCLES ambassador schools have seen increased in-school and post-school outcomes for students with disabilities who have participated in CIRCLES
  - Students who were at risk of dropping out have stayed in school and graduated
  - Students have gained jobs in school and kept those jobs post-school
  - Students are living more independently
  - Community connections have increased across the three districts
  - Increased collaboration between employers, VR, CTE, and other community partners
- Impact of CIRCLES from Rogers Public Schools Participants (4 min.)
- The IRT model continues to be used by VA DARS VR Counselors in partnership with their community partners.
- Grant Participants Discuss the Impact of IRT (5 min.)

The contents of this document were developed under Cooperative Agreement #H326E200003 from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and one should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.