



# Infusing Self-Advocacy Skills in Transition-to-Work Programs to Increase Employment Outcomes for Youth with IDD



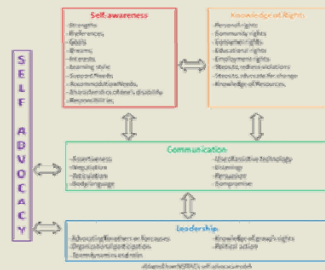
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## Self-Advocacy and Employment

New York (NY) is one of eight states receiving funding from the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to address barriers to employment for youth and young adults with with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). One strategy being utilized in NY Partnerships in Employment Systems Change project is to **infuse the development of self-advocacy skills into high school transition-to-work programs**, as well as working to **make purposeful connections between transition-aged youth and area self-advocacy groups** that can serve as a support network once these youth have entered the adult work of work. To this end, a year-long self-advocacy training initiative was piloted to work in conjunction with existing transition-to-work programs in Western NY.

Utilizing the NSTTAC Self-Advocacy Model (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005) as a framework, youth currently engaged in transition-to-work programs, adult self-advocates, and school instructional staff worked together to map out a series of skill building activities to be incorporated into a **series of self-advocacy summits**, and the **classroom** map out a series of skill building activities to learning portion of the programs. Activities were planned intentionally to build in complexity and intensity as the school year progressed and students moved closer to graduation and entering the workforce. The effort culminated in a **reverse career fair**, providing youth with the opportunity to meet with potential employers and promote their as part of their search for employment.



## Process and Lessons Learned

**Our goal:** To introduce the concept of self-advocacy to students, with specific emphasis on the development and utilization of self-advocacy skills related to obtaining and maintaining employment. Secondary goals were to connect youth to area self-advocacy groups, and to increase business involvement in and awareness of this effort.

### Planning team and process:

- All steps to planning and implementation were accomplished by a collaborative team consisting of:
  - Students in seven Project SEARCH™ and Inclusive Higher Education (TPSID) transition programs
  - Transition teachers and job coaches
  - Self-advocates and staff from Self Advocates of New York State (SANYS)
  - Self-advocates and staff from Rochester Center for Independent Living (RCIL)
  - Developmental Disabilities Planning Council Staff
  - Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities Staff

### Lessons Learned:

- Be ready to accommodate differing abilities in the information gathering, planning and implementation. Whenever possible, meet in person to ensure full understanding by all committee members.
- Be aware of different cultures within the disability community and how these different groups can affect the dynamics of any events and/or materials that are produced. Having adaptable materials and diverse presenters can help in welcoming all potential voices to the table.
- Collaborating with groups that have different missions and agendas is challenging. Allow time for relationship-building and trust-building within the committee so that the team can work together more effectively.

## Pilot Year Outcomes and Next Steps

### Participation:

Eight transition-to-work programs in Western New York participated:

- 75 students and 25 program staff from (4) Project SEARCH™ and (4) TPSID (inclusive higher education) programs

Fifteen young adult self-advocates from SANYS and RCIL on the planning team

Area hiring managers from businesses in healthcare, banking, hospitality, and the not-for-profit sector participated in the reverse career fair

### Next Steps:

- Content from Summits and classroom training materials revised based on feedback from participants
- Classroom resources expanded
- Enhanced business outreach for reverse career fair (scheduled for May 2014)
- Outreach to additional transition-to-work programs in the local area
- Replicate in other regions in New York State

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## Timeline of Transition-to-Work Self-Advocacy Key Activities

September



1<sup>st</sup> Youth Summit:  
Introduction to Self-Advocacy, Self-Awareness, Rights & Responsibilities

Classroom Resources Provided.  
Focus on:  
Self-Awareness  
Knowledge of Rights

January

2<sup>nd</sup> Youth Summit:  
Introduction to Communication and Leadership

Classroom Resources Provided.  
Focus on:  
Communication  
Leadership

June

3<sup>rd</sup> Youth Summit:  
Wrap Up and Reverse Career Fair

