

IMPROVING TRANSITION OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES IN SAN FRANCISCO

Improving Transition Outcomes Project (ITOP)
Interagency Council

Final
Needs Assessment

January 2007

Table of Contents

- I. **Executive Summary**
- II. **Introduction**
- III. **What's Working: The Perspectives of Youth, Parents and Service Providers**
- IV. **What's Not Working: Challenges and Barriers Identified by Youth, Parents and Service Providers**
- V. **What Needs to Be Improved: Ideas from Youth, Parents, and Providers to Improve the Transition Process**
- VI. **Summary/Next Steps**
- VII. **Appendix (under separate cover)**

For more information on the Improving Transition Outcomes Project, please contact:



**SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES
OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**
2601 Mission St. #606, San Francisco, CA 94110
415/282-7494



JEWISH VOCATIONAL SERVICE
225 Bush St., Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94104
415/391-3600



M O O R E I A C O F A N O G O L T S M A N , I N C .

I. Executive Summary

In the fall and winter of 2005, The Improving Transitions Outcomes Project (ITOP) Council developed and implemented a series of focus groups for youth with special needs and parents/caretakers; ITOP obtained additional information and data from parents and service providers through written surveys.

The following themes emerged from these needs assessment activities. Overall, youth with disabilities expressed goals and aspirations similar to all youth: a desire for a good education (often post-secondary), a rewarding job or career, a family and home of their own, and a secure, self-sufficient, independent, happy life. Youth and their families call on a wide range of services and support networks to achieve these goals. While many of the services meet their needs, others do not. Below is a summary of *What's Working*, *What's Not Working*, and *What Needs to Be Done*.

What's Working

In their comments in the focus groups and surveys, individual youth and families talked about many positive experiences with transition services and programs, and cited numerous examples of programs that were working for them. In addition to the formal support systems by the government and non-profit groups, individuals were grateful for the assistance provided by family, friends and community. Several also cited examples of individuals – caring educators, social workers, and health care providers – who had been helpful in the transition process.

However, there was no consistency in responses that would indicate a well-functioning system of transition. Among the services considered as “working” were several that parents located themselves and/or paid for privately.

What's Not Working

The experiences of youth, parents, and providers varied greatly, but several themes emerged to indicate where problems were occurring in transition services and programs. Lack of service coordination and lack of information appeared to be the key to many of the difficulties participants experience in the transition process.

Systemic problems were cited by all groups. Youth, parents and professionals experienced difficulties accessing needed services due to a lack of information, gaps in available services and resources, and inadequate coordination of services and case management.

Youth, parents and service providers identified many barriers, including intangibles, such as lack of respect and lack of confidence, as well as tangibles such as poor

transportation, lack of job opportunities, dearth of social programs and problems with school.

There are a number of services and programs that youth and parents felt were missing. Chief among the complaints was the lack of after-school and summer programs for youth, and especially lack of socialization opportunities. Several families were unhappy with the lack of vocational training, particularly for academically-challenged youth. In some cases, the jobs available to youth paid no better than the SSI system.

They also mentioned poor communication between school and home. Many individuals expressed concern that services were not reaching all youth. Of particular concern were low-income or non-English speaking families; those in transitional housing; children in or leaving foster care; and individuals who are out of school.

What Should Be Improved

Youth, parents and providers who participated in Needs Assessment activities had various and imaginative suggestions for improvements to the transition system. Increased access to transition-related information about programs, services and resources and better coordination of services were among the most commonly expressed ideas. Individuals wanted more opportunities for youth to socialize, to learn independent living skills and to participate in internships and job training programs. Participants also stated that the creation of after-school and summer programs for youth was extremely important. Specific strategies included a resource center for young adults where they could receive assistance with service coordination, a comprehensive mentoring program, and a robust system of communication between family and service providers at critical transition times.

II. Introduction

Background

The Improving Transition Outcomes Project (ITOP) Interagency Council, a collaborative group of 25 San Francisco organizations and agencies working together to improve transition services and outcomes for youth with disabilities, was convened in the spring of 2005 to undertake a comprehensive strategic planning process for transition services in the City and County of San Francisco. The ITOP Council began its work by conducting an in-depth needs assessment of the transition process for youth with disabilities in San Francisco in the fall of 2005, including a community needs assessment, a series of focus groups on the transition experiences of youth and their families, and surveys of parents and service providers.

This Needs Assessment is part of a larger effort to document existing transition services for youth with disabilities in San Francisco. The Council will use the results of the focus groups and surveys in conjunction with other data to identify strategies to improve transition services. The Council's work will culminate in a strategic plan to better meet the needs of the city's youth with disabilities as they enter adulthood.

Methodology Summary

This report was assembled from the results of focus groups for youth and for parents and guardians and from surveys of both parents and service providers. Additional details on methodology and participants are in a separate document, the Needs Assessment Appendix.

Focus Groups

Fifty-seven (57) youth and 48 adult family members participated in the focus groups, which were held in October, November and December of 2005.

Each of the seven two-hour youth focus groups included at least eight participants and was facilitated by one youth and the ITOP Interagency Coordinator. The groups were:

- A youth pilot group with training for participants as facilitators for other groups
- Youth in foster care
- Youth in the juvenile justice system
- Youth with developmental disabilities
- Youth with physical disabilities
- Youth with mental health challenges

- Youth with learning disabilities.

There were also five focus groups for parents of transition-aged youth with disabilities: 2 for Chinese-speaking families, 2 for English-speaking families and 1 for Spanish-speaking families. Participants from an additional group of Spanish-speaking families of transition-age youth with disabilities were surveyed individually by phone using the focus group questions.

Comments from both youth and parent participants were recorded by the facilitator. Questions and comments from all groups can be found in the Appendix.

How Focus Group data is used in this report: Comments from the focus groups of youth and parents were combined with the survey comments of parents and providers from the three main topic areas: *What's Working? What's Not Working? What Should Be Improved?* Representative comments were then grouped into theme areas.

Surveys

The ITOP Council developed three surveys:

- one for families of transition-age youth with disabilities,
- one for service providers and other professionals working with transition-age youth with disabilities, and
- one for directors of agencies serving transition-age youth or individuals with disabilities.

Participants completed surveys online or returned surveys by mail or fax. More than 5,000 surveys were mailed. A total of 269 surveys were received: 180 from families, 73 from service providers, and 16 from agency directors.

The parent surveys consisted of four sections:

- Demographic data (disability of youth, preferred language, ethnicity, etc.).
- A comments section, in which parents had the opportunity to express their opinions on several questions (e.g., What is working for you and your youth? What are the challenges?).
- A ratings section, in which parents assigned numerical values to indicate their opinions on the quality of youth and family services they had used. A 1 to 5 scale was used, with 1 being "poor", and 5 being "excellent".
- A "need" section, where parents could check for "services your child needs."

The provider surveys also consisted of four sections:

- A demographic questionnaire that collected information on each provider's gender and ethnicity and the disabilities of the youth they serve.
- A comments section, in which service providers had the opportunity to express their opinions on questions (e.g., What's Working for you and the youth you serve? What are the challenges?).
- A check list where providers identified services their agencies or organizations provide, support or fund;
- A ratings section, in which providers identified the additional services they felt were most needed by youth and families by assigning them numerical values on a 1 to 5 scale, with 5 being the "highest need" and 1 being the "lowest need".

How survey information was used in this report:

- Demographic data on the parents and providers who completed surveys was compiled and can be found in the Appendix.
- Comments: As described above, written comments from parents and providers on the transition process --what is working, challenges, and their suggestions for improvement -- were combined with those of the focus groups. Representative comments were categorized by issue and are included in this report.
- Parents' identification and rating of "needed" services
- Provider identification of services their organization/agency offers
- Provider ratings of most needed additional services: The services that received the most "4" or "5" ratings (most needed) from providers are included in this report in the "Needs to be Improved" section;; a complete summary of provider service needs ratings is in the Appendix.

The survey of agency directors asked for in-depth information about each agency or organization, including demographic data on youth served and extensive background information on services provided. Results from that survey are included in the landscape document produced for the ITOP Council. To request a copy of the ITOP Landscape, please contact Support for Families at 415-282-7494.

III. What's Working: The Perspectives of Youth, Parents and Service Providers

Focus Group and Survey Comments From Youth, Parents and Providers

In the focus groups of youth and parents, and in comment sections of the parent and provider surveys, Needs Assessment participants identified existing services and programs that are aiding the transition from youth to adulthood. Representative comments from youth, parents and providers have been grouped by the issue addressed.

1. Education

Parents, youth and providers all cited examples of educational services that were working well at both the high school and college levels.

Youth:

- *DSPS (Disabled Students Programs & Services) is working. Can go in to talk to counselors, get help: early registration, extra time on tests*

Parents:

- *School is working, I can work and not worry. He still enjoys school.*
- *What's working is that we pay for all extra services (extra speech/math tutoring/writing) so that our child can pass the CAHSEE (CA high school exit exam). The child is doing well with our efforts tutoring her and helping her through high school.*

Providers:

- *The community college system has done well to provide services to transitioning youth.*
- *More students are thinking of wanting to go to college.*

Parents and youth cited several **specific educational programs** that were working well for them. Although not an inclusive list, those mentioned most frequently were:

- Services offered by the San Francisco Unified School district (SFUSD):
 - vocational education programs,
 - special education guidance counselor,
 - transition services,
 - inclusion support teacher,
 - one-to-one aide
- Specific school programs through SFUSD:
 - Lincoln High School
 - Mission High School,
 - Horace Mann Middle School,
 - Alta Program at SOTA,
 - Lowell High School

- Programs offered through City College of San Francisco:
 - DSPS (Disabled Students Programs & Services)
 - Tech Department
 - EOPS (Extended Opportunity Programs and Services) counselor
- Other programs and services
 - Privately obtained services
 - consultation with an educational psychologist

2. Employment

There were a number of services cited by providers, parents, and youth as providing positive and successful vocational experiences.

Youth:

- *Job training – I am in the job training process now. It teaches you how to do things, what you are going to do. It is something meaningful to do so I don't come back to YGC (Youth Guidance Center).*
- *Job Corps – I am in the Culinary Hospitality program. When I am done I want to go to college for this.*
- *Volunteering at hospital to visit with patients.*
- *JVS (Jewish Vocational Services) is working for me. They understand me and accommodate my disability. When I need a job, they are there for me! I am currently on their youth council. The counselor listens to me!! Things I was not involved in I am involved in now at JVS. JVS helped me to get a job. They make me feel like a star! JVS has specialists. This is good.*

Parents:

- *He has a local neighborhood job with an agency that has an excellent record working with youth. The hours are minimal. He helps with household chores and some minor expenses...*

Providers:

- *Providing one-on-one job coaching when requested at each job site. Having a direct contact with the students' supervisors at each job site and having the support of the school's liaison.*
- *Vocational and situational assessments, job exploration and job placement/job coaching services from providers skilled in working with this population.*

Specific employment programs and services that were cited by youth and parents included:

- Jewish Vocational Services (JVS)

- Those who had jobs or volunteer opportunities found them to be very important.
- Job training programs through Youth Guidance Center, WorkAbility
- Bridges From School to Work
- Job internships and assistance through the Department of Rehabilitation

3. Support Systems

Parents and youth cited a number of social and family support systems that were important to the success and wellbeing of both youth and their families.

Youth:

- *I have family, friends and people by my side.*
- *Karate is going well. I have done it 3 ½ years. It lowers my stress when I do forms and exercise.*
- *I am surrounding myself with people who understand and who have been through similar struggles...meeting people/adults who have had similar situations.*
- *I have a dedicated therapist to help me a lot. I have a psychiatrist. He helps me a lot.*

Parents:

- *Special Olympics: a source of friends and physical activities. [A chance to] see people at different stages.*
- *SFCD [Support for Families] workshops, other resources, were great to attend to have some idea of what to expect.*
- *Support groups of peers so you don't feel alone.*
- *Respite through GGRC [Golden Gate Regional Center]: it helps a lot!*
- *My son receives socialization help in two programs. Both groups have been exceptionally good for him.*
- *The after-school Beacon Center has been very supportive and willing to work with/adapt the program for my son.*

Several **specific support programs and services** were cited by individual youth and parents as being helpful:

Identified services offered through public and non-profit agencies:

- Transportation
- Meals provided
- Respite
- Individual social workers
- Support groups
- Community training

Services obtained privately:

- After-school caretaker (paid for with private funds)
- Websites
- Medication

Specific agencies cited:

- California Children Services (CCS)
- Golden Gate Regional Center (GGRC)
- In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)
- Medi-Cal
- San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

Specific non-profit agencies mentioned:

- ARC San Francisco
- Independent Living Resource Center San Francisco
- Janet Pomeroy Center
- Project Insight
- Protection and Advocacy, Inc
- San Francisco Challenger League
- Special Olympics
- Support for Families of Children with Disabilities
- UCSF's Teen Clinic

180 parent survey respondents were asked to identify “*youth services your youth currently need.*” However, the parent survey did not clarify whether or not the youth currently receive the needed service. The chart below shows the top 8 programs that parent respondents said their youth presently need.

Program	NEED
After-School Programs	79
Social Opportunities	74
Independent Living Skills	66
Special Education Support Programs	66
Benefit Counseling	65
Employment Counseling / Job Placement	65
Tutoring	64
Vocational Training	64

Summary

In their comments in their focus groups and surveys, individual youth and families talked about many positive experiences with transition services and programs, and cited numerous examples of programs that were “working” for them. In addition to the formal support systems provided by the government and non-profit groups, individuals were grateful for the assistance provided by family, friends and community.

Several also cited examples of individuals – caring educators, social workers, and health care providers – who had been helpful in the transition process.

However, there was no consistency in responses that would indicate a well-functioning system of transition. Among the services considered as “working” were several that parents located themselves and/or paid for privately.

IV. What's Not Working: Challenges and Barriers Identified by Youth, Parents and Service Providers

Focus Group and Survey Comments From Youth, Parents and Providers

In their focus groups and surveys, youth, family members, and providers identified challenges and offered their comments on what is not working well in the transition process. Statements from the focus groups and comments from the parent and provider surveys were grouped to identify common themes.

There was one youth comment and 48 parent survey comments that did not list any challenges, or stated that everything was fine.

1. System Challenges

1.1 Youth and families are not receiving enough information about services, rights, and responsibilities: Youth, parents, and providers commented on a lack of information about transition services and resources.

Youth:

- *What is difficult is learning about resources. It's really difficult to find out or learn about programs and resources that will help me. The hospital did not inform me about the services. People at the hospital did not know. There needs to be a systematic way to inform consumers.*
- *Even though MV transportation is unreliable, I was not aware of this service for people with disabilities.*

Parents:

- *[There is] a lack of informed direction and information about future options, disability rights and appropriate educational supplements and help.*
- *We are not clear about what his options are for living outside our home when he comes of age.*
- *Not enough information. My daughter will be going into a transition program next year, but we haven't been given a list of sites to visit.*

Providers:

- *The young adults [are] unaware of the opportunities, services, programs that are available to them.*
- *Parents are not educated on their rights*

1.2 Youth and families have difficulty accessing needed services: Parents expressed frustration at what they saw as a lack of services and resources for their children and/or difficulty in obtaining the services that exist and a lack of follow up. Some providers cited inadequate funding for needed resources.

Youth:

- *Finding different speech services. Speaking is hard. Most speech programs are for stroke or older victims and pre-aged people -- program/service people in their 20s or outside the school system. Makes me feel like I am dumb. It is very difficult. I wish speech services were more accessible for age appropriate, more affordable for transition age youth!*

Parents:

- *Recommendations by professionals should be implemented.*
- *[I] was given paperwork from Director of Rehabilitation, submitted it and [they] never followed through.*
- *[I am] so tired of fighting for my child's benefits. Tired of fighting for services with people who are supposed to help.*
- *[The] Residential Center Plan was to be given \$60 and taken to a [single room occupancy] hotel.*

Providers:

- *Youth with disabilities, low-income youth, and youth in unstable housing situations face huge challenges in San Francisco due to the insufficient resources for health, housing and employment and training.*
- *[There is a] lack of appropriate funding for serving youth with disabilities in out of school hours*
- *[There are] not enough services for youth transitioning from foster care. Not enough adult services with youth not being ready for navigate the adult services.*

1.3. Dissatisfaction with service quality: Even when they were able to obtain services, some parents felt that those services were not adequate or did not provide enough individualization to meet the needs of their children. Some professionals commented on the difficulty in providing individualized services to youth.

Youth:

- *Not getting to meet with counselor/teacher because he leaves early (2-3 pm).*
- *I was told that it was not possible for me to become independent. I was turned away. I was told misinformation. Most professionals were lazy. If we all carry our own weight this would be OK!*

Parents:

- *Some programs try to rush the youth out of transition.*
- *Transition services are "cookie-cutter" models and don't necessarily fit all kids.*

- *My daughter's vocational education program through [the school district] is not tailored to meet her needs; she is supposed to fit into the already-existing program.*
- *I cannot envision a future living situation for my daughter because of her medical needs, and have asked my case manager for help visiting some programs. It's now been 17 months and nothing has happened on my request.*
- *When applying for assistance it's dehumanizing – people were rude.*

Providers:

- *[The school district] seems to be totally unprepared to offer clear transition plans for ALL students with disabilities*
- *[There are] different skill levels in one class. It can be too easy for some and incredibly challenging to others.*

1.4. Poor coordination of services and/or lack of good case management: All groups expressed frustration about the difficulty of understanding a range of services across agencies.

Youth:

- *There needs to be a resource center in the hospital.*

Parents:

- *Parents have to be case managers. Youth is now own case manager with parent assistance. No help on it.*
- *[We] need to know what's out there – told “just go look at all the programs”. Not laid out, etc.*
- *Out of high school no one is responsible for OT (occupational therapy), communication systems, etc.*
- *[The] system is designed to keep you out – discourage you.*

Providers:

- *The school district needs to centralize transition efforts. It is left up to local High Schools. No coordinated effort.*
- *[There is] a lack of coordinated services across the board. i.e., the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. This ultimately makes youth and families of youth frustrated and disempowered. We need programs with specific outcomes that empower not just the youth, but the family unit as well.*
- *[There is] a lack of holistic and coordinated services that work on all areas of transition and are sensitive to the role families play in the lives of transition age youth.*
- *All involved professionals, parents and students aren't aware of all of the issues at hand and relevant progress or challenges.*

1.5 Problems with the way professionals are trained and/or how staff are allocated.

Parents:

- *Had to spend time explaining to professional how to write and implement a care plan, write measures, goals and outcomes.*
- *Residential centers in California. [I was] told "psychiatrists do not talk to parents."*
- *[My youth's] needs are complicated enough that she has a one-to-one aide, but the aide has messed up the program that was created...*
- *And teachers keep using same methods to teach that are not effective.*
- *When I tried to get him in the after school program, I was told that he couldn't attend because they didn't have appropriately trained staff to help in case he has a seizure there.*

Providers:

- *Since [the school district] consolidated the positions of Transitions Specialists, those duties have fallen on the already over-worked special education teacher. The outcomes for students are then compromised.*
- *Lack of knowledge and concern from generic youth agencies about serving youth with disabilities.*
- *I have had a very hard time working with kids' probation officers. The POs do not return phone calls are not as willing to work together to help the youth.*
- *Finding adult CCS [California Children Services] paneled providers.*

2. Difficulty With Education/Higher Education

2.1 Communication between schools and home, especially related to the IEP process: The IEP process is not working well for some parents.

Parents:

- *[I have] been lied to; information changed on IEPs and other paperwork.*
- *Son assaulted and parent not informed.*
- *[I have] been yelled at in IEPs.*
- *Parenting has been discussed without them knowing parent.*
- *Teachers write goals that are too broad.*

Provider:

- *Providing adequate explanation regarding completion of forms*
- *Students with disabilities can get lost in going from 1 large system to another. It helps when advocates know each other and can communicate with each other.*

2.2. Challenges for youth related to school success: All groups had comments about completing homework, obtaining good grades, and passing the California High School Exit Exam.

Youth:

- *School is not working. I am not rowdy type of teen.*
- *When I study for homework I can't remember it. My TBI [traumatic brain injury] gets in the way. English very difficult for me. Since my brain injury, it makes things a lot tougher now! For me!*

Parents:

- *The challenge for him is to study hard for homework.*
- *[His challenge is to] learn to adjust to high school. Getting his words and writing down. Also learning to write a complete sentence.*
- *He is angry, refusing to do any work, going to school without needed supplies and failing all classes.*

Providers:

- *[There are] students who won't be able to pass CAHSEE [California High School Exit Examination] because of low cognitive abilities but current transition programs are unsuitable because these are not SI students. These are kids who know how to use the bus but can't read a map etc, make change....*
- *[There are] transitioning kids who are not below 4th grade level but still very needy.*
- *Getting students to do homework [is a challenge].*

2.3 Difficulties for non-English speakers: Families with limited English skills seemed to have particular difficulties with the schools and the IEP.

Parents:

- *Poor/inadequate interpreters provided. Even professionals don't understand some of the special education terminology. Need specially trained interpreters.*
- *Services (bilingual) for LEP [Limited English Proficient] students not provided.*
- *I don't feel the district (SFUSD) has been very helpful in sharing information and services with me or with other families I know. I think this is true for all families, but especially true for those of us who do not readily speak/read English.*

Providers:

- *Monolingual families have difficulty understanding the transition concept. It is very hard, since I speak neither Chinese or Spanish. I had to rely on eligibility workers.*
- *Parents who are non-English speaking, and who may not be able to read in their respective languages.*

- *Communicating with parents can be also challenging, sometimes because of language barriers or cultural issues.*

2.4 Challenges related to higher education: Parents expressed several concerns about higher education, including finances and support services.

Youth:

- *Money for college*
- *When I study for homework I can't remember it. My TBI (traumatic brain injury) gets in the way. English is very difficult for me. Since my brain injury, it makes things a lot tougher now!*
- *At college (I need) help with note taking, studying*

Parents:

- *Transition from high school to SFSU [San Francisco State University] was difficult. DSPS [Disabled Students Program] not as accessible/"nice" as the program at CCSF [City College of San Francisco].*
- *Need to figure out how she's going to get around at college. Need to contact disabled student services.*
- *In one year she will be attending City College and it's going to be different for her.*
- *Need reassessment for services in college. Due to settlement/private school attendance, have to fund it ourselves.*

<h3>3. Employment Challenges</h3>

3.1 Challenges related to employment opportunities, including assessment, job training, supported employment and job placement services. Several participants also brought up the complications of trying to keep benefits, such as SSI, while also having meaningful work.

Youth:

- *Not enough jobs close to where I live that are interesting and pay well.*
- *In order for me to meet my needs each month I must work 2 jobs. Because I get paid once a month, it does not work for me!*
- *Obtaining a job is very hard because I am on SSI [Supplemental Security Income]. If I get a job it takes money from my SSI check. It is not incentive. If I get a job it is not enough. The money I can get is \$1,000. This does not allow me to earn money for the financial quality of my life. Because the dollar amount is about the same as simply staying on SSI without working, I am stuck in a catch 22. If I work 30 hours a week I am not going to make any more than just simply not working and still receiving SSI.*

Parents:

- *Need internships, entrepreneurial support with appropriate adjustments. [It is a] quality of life issue.*
- *My son has no work experience – no one is providing opportunities for him.*
- *I was amazed to realize on my own that my son was capable of doing repair work in the house. I needed help in re-tiling a wall in my home and my son was there, so I thought I would see how much he could help me. I really had no expectation, just thought I would try. After showing him how to do it a couple of times, he was able to do it independently! He actually finished patching the piece of wall that I was working on. I was so surprised and proud of him! My child is capable of learning a skill and eventually working, but no one is working with us to figure it out.*

Providers:

- *For non-foster kids who don't have supportive families it is difficult to find housing and employment opportunities except Job Corps.*
- *Difficult to find therapists with whom the youth can connect.*
- *Not enough paid internships are designed to accommodate blind and visually impaired youth between the ages of 14 to 21.*
- *Special Ed students need programs that can direct them to careers and job training after high school. The myth that everyone will go to college keeps students away from career training.*

4. Family/Youth Support Issues

4.1 Lack of support from family (for youth). In the focus groups, youth in foster care and those with mental health challenges were most likely to talk about difficulties with their families or a lack of family support.

Youth:

- *My mother and I – when I come over to see her we both yell at each other. I don't go over there any more. I have not seen my mother in 3 years.*
- *Living in a group home not with family. Having trouble communicating with my family and sister. My sister's cell phone is not working. I am not allowed to call mom. Not a good relationship with my mom. When I talk to her she interrogates me. My sisters cannot take care of me.*
- *Visiting mom – an adult is preventing it. I can't call because she does not have a phone (w/ TTY[teletype device for people with hearing impairments]). She has a cell phone I think. My father travels around the country but does not have TTY but has a phone. I need my own TTY or text messaging pager. I cannot use regular phone because of my hearing.*

4.2 Lack of support/ not enough respite care (for parents). Support challenges for parents included insufficient respite services and worries about their own health issues.

Parents:

- *Not having family in the area is really hard.*
- *Self and husband's physical limitations; both have medical issues – physical movement is getting harder.*
- *[The Regional Center] has been OK but when summer comes, [they] want to reduce respite hours. [I] have been asked how much I want to pay for day program. As a single parent I can't afford to pay. Parent needs those hours to take care of self spiritually, so go to church.*
- *If son gets sick I either have to get someone to take care of him or I miss work.*
- *Caseworker told parent "You're asking for too much." If I need a service, family has to go to GGRC, meet with the doctors, etc. So tired of fighting for child's benefits. Tired of fighting for services with people who are supposed to help.*

5. Independent Living Challenges

5.1 Financial and insurance issues. All three groups identified concerns about finances and confusing insurance and aid services.

Youth:

- *Not having enough study time. Not having Medi-Cal/healthcare. Not having a car. Need to be paid more – underpaid.*
- *I am stuck at \$850 – all my money goes to rent, food. I can not really move out of the hole. Because of the work rules of SSI [Supplemental Security Income], it is simply hard and the amount of time it will take is not worth it. The poor will be poor and the rich will be rich. Until I am able to take care of my health, I will not be able to work. It is not worth it. It is better to spend my time focusing on school!*

Parents:

- *Can she ever really support herself, keep a job, maintain enough stability to actually be on her own -- what about health care, mental health services, etc. without insurance? Working out insurance issues at work site. Who will cover her?*
- *Medi-Cal insurance once our child becomes an adult -- many doctors do not accept medical; low paying jobs do not provide insurance; there are no group health plans we can join through community organizations as churches, etc; private individual insurance is so expensive.*
- *Financially it is hard to continue to support my son and health insurance is a problem.*

Providers:

- *Challenges sometimes come in when a youth we serve are in the low income situation. Sometimes they do not have the funds for transportation (i.e. bus fare or BART fare)*
- *Economic disparity [is a challenge].*

5.2 Not enough training in independent living skills. Parents and providers cited challenges in providing youth sufficient training for independent living.

Parents:

- *Teachers ask parents for money for child to learn money/shopping skills – but not working well.*
- *Programs that just take kids out in the community day after day don't reflect real life. All programs should have a real purpose, real goals and reflect true experiences.*
- *My son really needs social skills--everyday "practical" skills training--and it doesn't seem to be offered through the school district.*
- *The big challenge for us is how to teach her to be more independent, like how to count money, and some self care.*

Providers:

- *Life skills need to be worked more into all curriculum and programs helping youth transition. Education or a job by itself is not enough. Youth must have the ability to provide for themselves, and track their lives as active participants.*

5.3 Problems with housing/out of home placement.

Parents:

- *[It is difficult] finding an apartment for people with disabilities.*
- *Lack of independent housing a big problem.*
- *Housing, housing, housing.*

Providers:

- *There are few supportive housing programs - this is what we need more than anything to help youth become more independent adults and make a successful transition.*
- *Lack of affordable housing, especially for former foster youth is a big issue.*

6. Social/Recreational Challenges
--

6.1 Challenges with social interactions, recreation, and the arts.

Youth:

- *I want to meet other girls like me – Asperger’s Syndrome.*
- *There are social programs and centers. But there are not many social programs in the city for youth with disabilities.*
- *At CCSF(City College of San Francisco) – hard to make friends – big, impersonal place.*

Parents:

- *There are no social programs we know of where he can have friends and things to do after school.*
- *Social connections -- no friends.*
- *Few social activities available. Hard to get together with her friends. Hard to make friends.*
- *Another challenge is a serious lack of recreational and social gathering opportunities for my daughter. She was educated in an inclusive setting through high school and friendships outside the classroom did not develop. She has no relationships with people outside of her daily program.*

Providers:

- *[There is a] lack of safe and positive, social and community recreation opportunities for youth with more significant disabilities.*

6.2 Challenges with social skills, sexuality, decision-making.

Parents:

- *Any information or focus re: sexuality and affection?*
- *He feels attractions for girls. I wonder sometimes if, one day, he could have a relationship, and that worries me a lot because I don't know what I would do. I want to protect him. He thinks everybody is nice.*
- *Appropriate expectations and personal freedom in teenage years.*
- *Looking at people too long, saying the wrong things at times.*

7. Other Problems and Challenges

Youth, parents, and providers also cited several other aspects of transition that were not working for them.

7.1 Challenges related to individual disabilities. Youth and parents talked about the challenges related to particular disabilities or special health care needs.

Youth:

- *Personal grooming is hard. I don't know when to STOP sometimes. Teeth brushing, flossing, combing hair. OCD [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder] gets in the way! It takes away from things that could be more productive, i.e. social situations. Also obsessions takes away time from my job. I've never had a job that I have stayed on for a long time. Because of my OCD. My learning disability also makes it more difficult. I'm not taking advantage of ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] laws that will help with accommodations.*
- *My disabilities – ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder], dyslexia – affect me in every way.*

Parents:

- *He takes longer to understand.*
- *Since she has convulsions and does not know she is going to have them, she needs to be accompanied at all times.*
- *He is very oppositional, and doesn't take direction, and has no (almost) impulse control.*

Providers:

- *A challenge is to work with all youths with various disabilities on [the] same level. Some youth require more time and special attention.*

7.2 Keeping focused, self-discipline. All groups placed some responsibility on youth themselves.

Youth:

- *Staying away from the wrong groups, i.e. drugs, gang-banging.*
- *Confusing thoughts and habits are keeping me in a “box”. Not drugs but self-improvement habits.*
- *I am hurting my self by lagging off on getting drivers license. I am not putting enough effort into getting things done.*

Parents:

- *If he ever leaves home for college, he will have to organize himself and find the inner discipline to do the work he needs to.*

Providers:

- *One challenge appears to be either client retention or client engagement in services. While this city has much to offer, if services are not being accessed by youth, or accessed irregularly, they have far less of a positive impact than if a youth were fully engaged in services.*
- *Getting students to follow through with applications for financial aid and other related items.*
- *Getting some to come to the classes.*

7.3 Transportation issues.

Youth:

- *MUNI is not working for me. I have to leave 1 hour and 45 minutes earlier to get to school. SF is only 8 miles wide/long.*
- *Transportation is difficult because if my family members are not around, it is hard for me to get to the bus stop due to my disability.*
- *MV transportation is always late! Lack of transportation service for people with disabilities.*

Parents:

- *Daughter hasn't received Fast Pass – has asked for it through IEP [Individual Education Program]. Sometimes have to walk to school because family doesn't have change for bus.*

7.4 Communication/lack of respect/ problems between youth and adults: As with most people, youth and adults don't always see eye to eye.

Youth:

- *Communicating with older, adult figures that talk down to you, but give adult consequences, i.e. adult prison for youth offenses.*
- *Communication with adults because of the age difference. They (adults) think they know what is better but things are different.*
- *Teachers (people) don't want to hear your side.*
- *You must respect them but they don't have to respect you.*

Parents:

- *[It is a challenge] to understand each other. She wants to open up to me.*
- *To be able to understand each other and that it not affect me when he makes an out of place comment.*
- *We can't fully communicate.*

7.5 The stigma of having a disability: Some parents and providers cited negative experiences with public reactions to disability.

Youth:

- *People see me in disabled classes. People close me off. Nothing worse that I hate than stereotyping people -- acting like people with disabilities are dumb. We are not dumb. I feel like an ANT sometimes.*
- *My good friend has CP [cerebral palsy] and people would stare.*
- *Kids pick on me. I try to ignore it. I almost got into a fight.*
- *"We're all rejects" – artists and students with disabilities. We should be together, but there's a gap.*

Parents:

- *“Mental abuse/brainwash” stigma of disability keeps him from accessing DSPS [Disabled Students Programs & Services] support.*
- *The school needs more disability awareness for students/faculty. More clubs need to be offered at school to assist with this need. (Spec. Ed. dept. of school has not been any help with this need for past 2 yrs. despite several requests from us (parents) and mental health therapist (AB3632)).*
- *The prejudices they face in society due to disabilities, race, and background and how to cope with that and to ask for assistance when needed.*

7.6 Lack of personal safety: Some parents and providers brought up issues related to crime and violence in the city.

Youth:

- *I was robbed by my house and had a gun put to my head. I have had two guns pulled on me. Someone tried to stab me on the bus. [There is] no safety. I feel real sense of danger. Too much violence to me.*
- *Street safety. I have to look really carefully when I cross the street. A car could run me over. My sister’s boyfriend saw a lady get killed by a car. People with disabilities are basically not safe. When I cross the street especially at night I must be careful.*
- *When I take the bus I don’t sit in the back of the bus. I sit up front of the bus; I feel safer.*

Parents:

- *Everyday life with so many young people getting killed.*

7.7 Lack of self-confidence, self-esteem: Comments from some parents and providers brought up challenges related to youth’s views of themselves.

Parents:

- *[We need to] help children feel good about themselves so they don’t dwell on negative, but see the positive as well.*
- *He has no vision of what he wants to do beyond high school. He expresses an interest in culinary arts, but he thinks it's too hard for him to get in.*
- *I am not very sure but she needs help to have more confidence in herself that she can accomplish anything she sets her mind to and go far as she is very intelligent.*

Providers:

- *[It is a challenge] finding ways to maintain youth's self-esteem and hope.*

7.8 Parents’ responsibilities: Some providers’ comments faulted parents for some transition challenges.

Providers:

- *Most families do not respond to mailed requests for transition planning assistance.*
- *Parents at times are over protective about their children. They are scared or hesitant to have their child/children step outside of the box. It makes a bit of a challenge for us at times to better serve our clients. Some parents are afraid to let their child/children grow up and face the outside world. In our case, the real world.*
- *[There is] little or no parent involvement.*

7.9 Additional Issues: Individual youth, parents, and providers also commented on additional barriers to successful transition they faced. These included:

- *Difficulty accessing assistive technology resources*
- *Peer pressure, especially related to drugs, alcohol abuse, and gangs*
- *Negative experiences with the Juvenile Justice system*
- *Racism*
- *Legal issues*
- *Fitting transition into the curriculum*

Survey Ratings of Programs and Services by Parents

In their surveys, families rated services used by their youths on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being “excellent” and 1 being “poor”.

The tables below shows the youth and family services that received ratings of “1” or “2” from 50% or more of the parents who rated the service. Because specific programs were not identified, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from this data. The complete scores and rankings from parent surveys are in the Appendix.

Parent Ratings of Youth Services	# who rated	% rating 1 or 2
ILSP: Independent Living & Support Services	137	60%
Social Opportunities	213	52%
Self-Advocacy Training	152	52%
Independent Living Skills	175	51%

Summary

The experiences of youth, parents, and providers varied greatly, but several themes emerged to indicate where problems were occurring in transition services and programs. Lack of service coordination and lack of information appeared to be the key to many of the difficulties participants experience in the transition process.

Systemic problems were cited by all groups. Youth, parents and professionals experienced difficulties accessing needed services due to a lack of information, gaps in available services and resources, and inadequate coordination of services and case management.

Youth, parents and service providers identified many barriers, including intangibles, such as lack of respect and lack of confidence, as well as tangibles such as poor transportation, lack of job opportunities, dearth of social programs and problems with school.

There are a number of services and programs that youth and parents felt were missing. Chief among the complaints was the lack of after-school and summer programs for youth, and especially lack of socialization opportunities. Several families were unhappy with the lack of vocational training, particularly for academically-challenged youth. In some cases, the jobs available to youth paid no better than the SSI system.

They also mentioned poor communication between school and home. Many individuals expressed concern that services were not reaching all youth. Of particular concern were low-income or non-English speaking families; those in transitional housing; children in or leaving foster care; and individuals who are out of school.

V. What Needs to Be Improved: Ideas from Youth, Parents, and Providers

Focus Group and Survey Comments From Youth, Parents and Providers

Youth, family members, and providers had many ideas about ways the transition experience might be improved for young people with disabilities. Statements from each of the focus groups and comments from the parent and provider surveys were grouped to identify common themes.

1. System Changes

1.1. Develop ways to better coordinate services: Parents and providers wanted to see better service coordination and collaboration among agencies to make access to information and services easier for youth and families.

Parents:

- *Develop one resource so families can get to it; that's been rated so it's reliable. [Families] rely on getting "lucky" and finding the right information [about] health, educational, etc.*
- *Partner with other agencies to form more comprehensive net of services, e.g. Parks & Recreation, San Francisco State University, City College, other non-profits.*
- *The [school district] should work with state and community colleges to set up a program for adults with high-functioning autism.*
- *There should be a center where older youth that have a disability(ies) can receive assistance without the whole bureaucrat problems.*

Providers:

- *[Provide] a case manager for each of the youth that stays with them.*
- *How about a transition focused "one stop center" type place where youth transitioning to adulthood can hang out, meet new people, and become educated about issues that can improve their transitional outcomes, etc.*
- *...It would be great to know the year before who will be graduating and leaving the school system enabling the adult service providers to give parents and families the information they need to make a decision about the next step for their child and which service provider will be able to work best with their child.*
- *[Have] stronger communication between SSI [Supplemental Security Income] and DHS [Department of Human Services]. Start emancipator meetings much earlier prior to leaving the foster care system -- 1 year start or before that. Then meet every 3 months to confirm plan.*

1.2 Provide more -- and more timely -- information about services, rights, and responsibilities: All groups wanted more information about transition options, services and resources. Parents seemed especially frustrated with how difficult it was to get all the information they needed to make decisions and plans.

Youth:

- *At discharge from hospital have resource information available, i.e. pamphlet or websites.*
- *Make it easier to find ways to go to college. .. Make it more accessible, [provide] information.*
- *Would have been nice to know about disability services ahead of time. To have had money somewhere before moving out. Known more about living on my own – life skills.*

Parents:

- *There need to be more opportunities for families to learn about transition (all services), and this shouldn't happen after the child is in high school. This needs to happen early on so that families can really think ahead and help their children.*
- *The array of services should be presented so families know all the options, like HRIIC [High Risk Infant Interagency Council].*
- *[We need] a comprehensive system of communication informing families at critical phases, such as, middle to high school, post high school, etc. of what rights and options are available.*

Providers:

- *Provide teachers with a directory of resources categorized by interest.*
- *Offer more informational meetings for parents*

1.3 Improve professional training and staffing: Several youth, parents, and providers wanted to see changes in the way transition services are staffed, the skills of professionals, and/or how professionals are trained.

Youth:

- *Teachers need to know what students need, listen, understand different learning processes, know what they are teaching*
- *Have my social worker do their job instead of me*

Parents:

- *More competent social workers well-versed in this area with all services and resources for children/families, including medical, social, etc. Let it be area of expertise.*
- *School paras need more training.*

Providers:

- *Put one person who wants the job of ensuring transition plans at [the school district] into that role.*

- *I'd get a job developer to help the teachers contact and develop job sites for the transitional students. Teachers have to be with the students and do job development on their own time. Networking takes time.*

1.4. Change when transition services begin: Several providers had suggestions about changing when transition services should begin – although there was no agreement:

Providers:

- *Do not need transition planning for 14 and 16 year olds.*
- *Start transition later between 18 and 20 years.*
- *Start providing transition services earlier, particularly for youth in the foster care system and those not seeking higher learning. That way, youth will be linked up to services and have an idea of how to navigate the system and advocate for themselves when they come of age.*

1.5 Ensure more individualization of programs/services. Some parents felt that programs and services were not individualized enough to meet the need of their children.

Parents:

- *Programs tend to be “cookie cutter”; need to match family’s lifestyle and gear programs to match youth’s needs. Use creativity to plan.*

1.6 Let parents and youth be more involved in planning: Several participants in both the parent and youth groups want to see young people and their families have more say in programs and services.

Youth:

- *[Develop] more programs people are actually interested in.*

Parents:

- *[We] have to involve the kids who are part of this.*
- *[We need] more opportunities like this one [focus group] so that we can educate people about what our needs are.*

2. Education/Higher Education

2.1 Make changes to secondary schools to better meet needs: Youth, parents and providers all had ideas about middle and high schools. Parents and providers suggested focusing more attention on vocational classes and schools.

Youth:

- *More help at school – more individualized attention. Tutoring services.*
- *More one to one attention from teachers in school.*
- *People with disabilities want to modify the Exit Exam. Other kids say it is not fair. People with disabilities [have] individual needs.*

Parents:

- *What happened to the idea of vocational schools for non-academic kids? My son needs this!!!*
- *[There should be] the option of learning a skill/trade for those who are academically challenged. I feel my son has gotten so sick of trying and failing that he just isn't trying at all.*

Providers:

- *A high school (alternative high school) with enough room and staff to accommodate students who are not thriving in a regular high school. A self-paced program with credits received after passing each unit. If a student is out they do not have to be with a class where there is make-up work. They just pick up where they left off until they have enough credits to graduate.*
- *Change high school curriculum - Create a vocational program with survival language & basic math skills etc.*

2.2 Improve communication between schools and home, especially related to the IEP process: This was a major issue for parents. There were few concrete suggestions for improvement; most families who raised this issue expressed a desire that relationships could be better:

Parents:

- *School staff should listen to parents' feedback/input. Match goals to skills. Negotiate instead of arguing. Show respect to parents.*
- *IEP meetings [are] too short to address all issues.*
- *Goals should be broken down into smaller objectives. Small steps so that these can be met.*
- *Expectations of parents and teachers should be the same.*

2.3 Improve communications with non-English speakers: Several parents from the Cantonese and Spanish focus groups had suggestions for improving communications with non-English speakers

Parents:

- *Improve communication between home and school. Inadequate personnel who can speak native language of parents. Time limitations for interpreters for daily communication. (Scheduling) Sometimes must grab young person to interpret for parent.*
- *Interpreters need special training related to IEPs [Individual Education Programs], special education terminology.*

2.4 Provide more assistance to help youth with higher education: Some young people wanted more counseling, academic assistance, and financial support to enter and succeed in college and post-secondary programs.

Youth:

- *Better school counselors to help with college.*
- *Education and services to give me more financial resources for college.*

3. Employment

3.1 Improve employment opportunities, including assessment, job training, supported employment and job placement services. Youth, parents and providers all had suggestions about what would be needed to help young people gain employment.

Youth:

- *Skills to be a carpenter and to own my own business. AND (Asian Neighborhood Design program) has helped me.*
- *Job placement centers at schools.*

Parents:

- *Summer jobs for children in transition -- these services are 'available' in theory but not in reality.*
- *Since one of the main components of transitioning from youth to adult and student to self-sufficient responsible person requires certain skills, I would like to see more effort/resources towards work skills and life skills -- assessment of what jobs they can perform.*

Providers:

- *Provide more and varied vocational assessment. Especially useful are services that allow youth to observe actual job sites and, if interested, spend time doing work on a trial basis. Provide more/better job placement, especially useful are service providers that act as brokers and arrange jobs with youth who express interest in them.*
- *Create more paid internship opportunities for youth, not just during the summer but year-round.*

- *More opportunities for supported employment helping students to find out more about the world of work.*

4. Family/Youth Support

4.1 Provide more role modeling, mentoring and support groups for youth. Both young people and parents hoped to see more opportunities that would enable youth with disabilities to learn from successful role models and from peer groups:

Youth:

- *Meeting successful people to be inspired - people who have achieved things.*
- *Need someone to show you how – role models.*
- *Adult to be there*

Parents:

- *Develop a comprehensive mentoring program. Mentoring includes college, work, etc. Will develop buddies, can be attached to after school programs. Personal, education, health, relationships, finances and community involvement.*
- *I think that to make groups of girls with problems so they know that they are not alone, that there is a lot of support and people that understand and that are going through the same thing.*
- *I think he would benefit from a youth support group to help gain social skills and share support, develop strategies to become more independent. Youth need to be paid to work in a support group.*

4.2 Provide more training and support for parents: Several parents mentioned Support for Families training opportunities and support groups, but suggested more workshops and groups for families of transition-aged youth.

Parents:

- *SFCD [Support for Families of Children with Disabilities] [should] offer more workshops, for example, how to access services; geared to individual child's disability, learning style. Need help writing appropriate goals and objectives – i.e. IEP [Individual Education Program] workshop specifically for autistic children.*
- *Provision of the most updated and complete information by professional organizations so that parents will understand the nature and meaning of "transition". Help parents and children understand the development opportunities during the transition period.*
- *That there be more workshops for both parents and youth and that it be at their level of understanding.*
- *More support groups.*

4.3 Increase the individual help and guidance available to youth. All groups suggested individualized counseling and guidance from adults as a way to help youth with disabilities in transition.

Youth:

- *Help getting started / prepared for high school graduation and thinking about what to do after high school.*
- *[Help} getting a good job.*
- *A place to go for support with counseling. Environmental settings without violence that are positive and safe.*

Parents:

- *There should be counselors at school to work specifically with special needs students.*

Providers:

- *Make sure they have a stable adult in their life.*
- *We need more one on one counseling and support to assist students in obtaining jobs.*

5. Independent Living

5.1 Increase training in independent living skills. Youth, family members, and providers all wanted to see more training opportunities to prepare youth for independent living. Training in practical skills and practice in the community were mentioned most often.

Youth:

- *ILSP [Independent Living Skills Program for youth in foster care], if I didn't have ILSP I wouldn't know what I was doing.*

Parents:

- *Just keep in mind these kids are not ready. They need more help in lots of areas before leaving home. Keep doing IDLS [Independent Daily Living Skills]. It helps a lot.*
- *[As much] real world experience as possible.*
- *Home economics courses at school. Financial planning courses at school...*

Providers:

- *More ILS [Independent Living Skills] training*
- *Programs at the high schools that work with 18-22 year olds that help teach them how to budget money, get a job, and live on their own. Lowell High has this program and it seems to be very helpful for the disabled youth.*

5.2 Provide greater resources for housing and supported housing. All groups wanted to see more resources that would help youth to live more independently. The suggestions varied with the special needs of the youth.

Youth:

- *Would have been nice to have had money somewhere before moving out. Known more about living on my own – life skills. San Francisco would be affordable!*

Parents:

- *A supportive transitional housing program would be great.*
- *If on Saturdays or Sundays there is some place with a setting like he may live in the future that he can go to so he can get himself used to the environment, which may help him [be] less dependent on his mother, thus reducing his emotional distress in the future.*
- *Provide a listing of living quarters where it's safe and clean, community with support and networking for life times, "extended family," group gatherings, meetings, etc.*
- *Escort service to accompany child to go shopping or to work.*

Providers:

- *More housing for youth not ready for able to live on their own.*

6. Social/Recreational

6.1 Increase opportunities for social skills training and recreation (including sports and the arts) for youth with disabilities. All groups wanted more after-school and summer programs and social/recreational opportunities for teens and adults with disabilities. Suggestions included both and special social skills training and recreation programs for youth with disabilities and inclusive programs that would include all young people. Parents, especially, were anxious to see an increase in the quantity and quality of social and recreational opportunities.

Youth:

- *More programs to keep us busy – sports*
- *More things going on. There is not enough going on. More parties, social opportunities, dances*

Parents:

- *Create 'after-school hours' programs to provide social/recreational opportunities for young adults transitioning to develop social, recreational and leisure skills. This is a critical need. People with disabilities are living the same lives they did in the 1960s once the school day ends.*
- *An inclusive after school program to help teach my son with socialization, so that he can learn from non-disabled peers.*

- *There is a great need for social programs for children with severe disabilities. There are many early childhood programs and early intervention programs but virtually nothing for teens with disabilities in San Francisco, with the exception of Janet Pomeroy Center, which takes a FEW teens with SPECIFIC abilities. They are very exclusive. Hundreds of teens sit alone and watch TV when they could be together, enjoying each other's company.*

Providers:

- *Recreational activities that cause interaction and social activities with other young adults. Programs that stimulate youth [and] adults' intelligence and capabilities.*

7. Other Ideas

Several other suggestions and ideas that did not fit into the above categories were mentioned by more than one participant.

7.1 Personal responsibility: Youth in the Juvenile Justice focus group talked extensively about their need to keep focused and avoid negative influences.

Youth:

- *Stay away from bad friends, bad influences*
- *Don't get off track*
- *Know how to get there (goals). Self support a plan*
- *Know what you want, what is important, what you need*

7.2 Financial Support Resources: Several families and providers cited confusing regulations related to SSI [Supplemental Security Income] and health insurance.

Parents:

- *If a child didn't qualify for SSI due to parents having a job and child not 18, the child can only apply on their 18th birthday and then it takes 6 months to see if they can qualify or not and probably another 6 months to reapply and yet [the] child cannot receive any services/programs. So what happens [is that] a year is wasted for the child and the parent continues the financial, emotional and services – which continues the parent's burden and more stress – affecting parent/child relationship.*
- *Organization of group health insurance for those families who do not want to be on MediCal for their children.*

Providers:

- *Try to get connected with a benefits planner before it's too late and you have to go thru an appeal process to get benefits back*

7.3 Increase assistive technology information and support: A few parents and providers mentioned the need for improved access to assistive technology for youth.

Parents:

- *{A program} with tech available – should have a central place to find out about that's available. Need a central hub.*
- *More services in his Autism class such as Internet access*

Providers:

- *Greater education of the school staff about AT [Assistive Technology] and student/parent rights. More education of student and parents about their AT rights.*

7.4 Provide more disability awareness programs to increase acceptance/understanding of youth with disabilities: Several parents suggested that there be more training in disability awareness to increase acceptance of youth with special needs.

Parents:

- *Disability awareness – it seems OK to make comments or judgments about people with disabilities and people agree, laugh, and don't think anything about it.*
- *Education/training for kids that don't have disabilities, so that they can better understand our kids.*

7.5 Additional Issues. Individual youth, parent, and provider participants also offered ideas on other topics.

- Youth in the juvenile justice focus group wanted to see more schools and fewer prisons.
- Both youth and parents hoped to see improvements in the city's transportation system and special transportation for people with disabilities.
- A few comments cited the need for legal help to ensure enforcement of existing laws (e.g., ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] and to support for parents who need legal advice.

Provider Survey Ratings

Providers were asked to rate a list of services on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 representing "highest need" and 1 representing "lowest need." Below are the youth and family services that received the most "4" or "5" ratings (highest need) from those who providers who rated the service. A complete list of provider ratings can be found in the Appendix.

Services for Youth	Number who rated the service	% who rated it 4 or 5 (highest need)	% who rated it 3	% who rated it 1 or 2 (lowest needed)
Education	45	98%	2%	0%
Employment Counseling / Job Placement	48	96%	4%	0%
Independent Living Skills	47	89%	9%	2%
Vocational Training	45	89%	7%	4%
ILSP: Independent Living & Support Services	40	88%	8%	5%

Services for Families	Number who rated the service	% who rated it 4 or 5 (highest need)	% who rated it 3	%1 or 2 (lowest needed)
Information and Referral	32	94%	6%	0%
Mental Health Services	34	91%	9%	0%
Financial	36	75%	25%	0%
Parent Training	33	76%	21%	3%
Support Groups	33	73%	24%	3%

Summary

Youth, parents and providers who participated in Needs Assessment activities had various and imaginative suggestions for improvements to the transition system. Increased access to transition-related information about programs, services and resources and better coordination of services were among the most commonly expressed ideas. Individuals wanted more opportunities for youth to socialize, to learn independent living skills and to participate in internships and job training programs. Participants also stated that the creation of after-school and summer programs for youth was extremely important. Specific strategies included a resource center for young adults where they could receive assistance with service coordination, a comprehensive mentoring program, and a robust system of communication between family and service providers at critical transition times.

VI. Next Steps

Based upon the focus group and survey findings summarized in this report, an examination of the existing resources in the city and county of San Francisco, and a review of barriers, best practices, and strategies across the state of California and throughout the country, the ITOP Council will prepare a strategic plan to address barriers to successful transition for youth with disabilities in San Francisco.

The strategic plan will include a vision for the future, goals, strategies, and actions to improve transition services for youth with disabilities in the city. Prior to completing the strategic plan, the ITOP Council will release a landscape document, which will include demographic data for youth in the city and county of San Francisco; an inventory of existing services throughout the region; case studies of other cities; and additional data to help the Council better understand the current state of transition services in San Francisco.