

# **“Improving Outcomes for Youth in Transition”**

## **Iowa DHS Child Welfare Supervisor and Worker Curricula**

*A collaborative product of the University of Iowa School of Social Work and  
The Iowa Department of Human Services*

The University of Iowa School of Social Work (UI-SSW), in partnership with the Iowa Department of Human Services (IDHS) developed, implemented, evaluated, and is disseminating a training program for public child welfare supervisors and workers to improve outcomes for older youth in transition from foster care to adulthood. The three-year project is funded by the Children’s Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The project had three goals, each with specific objectives: 1) to strengthen the quality of public child welfare supervision to improve outcomes for Iowa youth in transition from foster care to independence; 2) to demonstrate a training model that engages supervisors and their workers in a learning and team-building process around the needs of youth in transition; and 3) to improve outcomes for youth in transition nationally, through varied dissemination activities.

Our approach builds on the core principles of youth development, cultural competence, collaboration, and permanent connections, and involves all Iowa Department of Human Services supervisors, line staff, and transitional planning specialists. We involved youth, IDHS staff, and community partners in each step, from information gathering through focus groups and interviews, to curriculum development, field-testing, implementation, and evaluation, through dissemination.

There are three phases to the curriculum. The first involves knowledge and skill building with supervisors. The second brings supervisors and their workers together in a learning/team-building model, in which supervisors will participate as co-trainers. The third phase involves regionally based community training, again with supervisors as leaders and facilitators.

The project evaluation will examine the impact of the training program on knowledge acquisition, utilization of skills, and outcomes for youth as measured through quantitative data and from the perspectives of both youth and professionals.

The key benefits of this project include developing and documenting a whole agency approach to improving outcomes for older youth in transition, producing and disseminating two distinct but complementary curricula to improve transitional planning for older youth; making the training and evaluation results widely available through printed and electronic means; and sustaining the capacity for ongoing training of new public child welfare employees through the University of Iowa – Iowa DHS partnership.

***Some comments from training participant in response to the question:  
“What did you find most useful about this program?”***

**Supervisors:**

- Good mix of theoretical orientations and practical application strategies.
- The tools to use to help workers identify possible support people. The ideas about what to do with complex kids. The resources available to this age group.
- Broadened my view of permanency and transition planning. Provided concrete ideas to implement in practice.
- Personal stories and connections with youth.
- The open discussion

**Caseworkers:**

- Services available for youth who are aging out of the system; hearing the youth talk about their experiences.
- Getting to use real life case examples to gain a better understanding of available support services.
- Some of the ideas to get kids and foster parents to get to know each other.

**Community participants:**

- Real life stories. Success stories help in this work -- it's good to have hope.
- Group sharing and networking. Training materials. Experience and expertise of trainers.
- The ways to look at supports outside of the box as well as reconnecting supports.

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