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**STATE OF VERMONT
JOINT FISCAL COMMITTEE**
1 Baldwin Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05633-5701

MEMORANDUM

To: James Reardon, Commissioner of Finance & Management

From: Rebecca Buck, Staff Associate *RB*

Date: March 8, 2007

Subject: Status of Requests

No Joint Fiscal Committee member has requested that the following items be held for review:

JFO #2286 – \$1,000,000 grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to the Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities & Health Care Administration. During fiscal year 2008 the Department will use this grant to fund \$1,000,000 of the \$2,500,000 budgeted for the creation and initial operation of a qualified high risk pool.
[JFO received 02/06/06]

JFO #2287 – \$250,000 grant from the Social Security Administration and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. to the Department of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living. This grant will fund a “Youth Transition Demonstration” pilot program. In combination with the existing statewide service system for youth in transition, this project will test a group of SSI waivers for youth designed to promote employment and economic self-sufficiency.
[JFO received 02/06/06]

In accordance with 32 V.S.A. §5, the requisite 30 days having elapsed since these items were submitted to the Joint Fiscal Committee, the Governor’s approval may now be considered final. We ask that you inform the Secretary of Administration and your staff of these actions.

cc: Linda Morse
Paulette Thabault
Cynthia LaWare
Patrick Flood



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STATE OF VERMONT
JOINT FISCAL COMMITTEE
1 Baldwin Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05633-5701

MEMORANDUM

To: Joint Fiscal Committee Members

From: Rebecca Buck, Staff Associate *RB*

Date: February 9, 2006

Subject: Grant Requests

Enclosed please find two (2) requests which the Joint Fiscal Office recently received from the Administration:

JFO #2286 – \$1,000,000 grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to the Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities & Health Care Administration. During fiscal year 2008 the Department will use this grant to fund \$1,000,000 of the \$2,500,000 budgeted for the creation and initial operation of a qualified high risk pool.

[JFO received 02/06/06]

JFO #2287 – \$250,000 grant from the Social Security Administration and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. to the Department of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living. This grant will fund a “Youth Transition Demonstration” pilot program. In combination with the existing statewide service system for youth in transition, this project will test a group of SSI waivers for youth designed to promote employment and economic self-sufficiency.

[JFO received 02/06/06]

The Joint Fiscal Office has reviewed these submissions and determined that all appropriate forms bearing the necessary approvals are in order.

In accordance with the procedures for processing such requests, we ask you to review the enclosed and notify the Joint Fiscal Office (Rebecca Buck at 802/828-5969; rbuck@leg.state.vt.us or Stephen Klein at 802/828-5769; sklein@leg.state.vt.us) if you would like any item(s) held for Legislative review. Unless we hear from you to the contrary by February 23 we will assume that you agree to consider as final the Governor's acceptance of these requests.

cc: James Reardon, Commissioner
Linda Morse, Administrative Assistant
Paulette Thabault, Commissioner
Cynthia LaWare, Secretary
Patrick Flood, Commissioner
Jim Hester, Director
Representative Steven Maier
Senator Jane Kitchel

INFORMATION NOTICE

The following items were received by the Joint Fiscal Committee:

JFO #2285 – \$1,000,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to the Department of Housing and Community Affairs and the Department of Economic Development. This grant will be used to capitalize Vermont's Brownfields Revitalization fund with \$750,000 utilized for loans to developers and eligible owners for hazardous materials remediation and \$250,000 utilized for loans for petroleum contamination remediation. [*JFO received 12/22/06*]

JFO #2286 – \$1,000,000 grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to the Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities & Health Care Administration. During fiscal year 2008 the Department will use this grant to fund \$1,000,000 of the \$2,500,000 budgeted for the creation and initial operation of a qualified high risk pool. [*JFO received 02/06/06*]

JFO #2287 – \$250,000 grant from the Social Security Administration and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. to the Department of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living. This grant will fund a "Youth Transition Demonstration" pilot program. In combination with the existing statewide service system for youth in transition, this project will test a group of SSI waivers for youth designed to promote employment and economic self-sufficiency. [*JFO received 02/06/06*]

STATE OF VERMONT
GRANT ACCEPTANCE FORM

JFO #
2287

DATE: January 5, 2007

DEPARTMENT: AHS/ Department of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living

GRANT/DONATION (brief description and purpose): Vocational Rehabilitation services for disabled youth in transition to work.

GRANTOR/DONOR: Social Security Administration and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

GRANT PERIOD: 1/1/07- 12/31/07 Awarded
1/1/08 – 12/31/12 Contingent

AMOUNT/VALUE: 1/1/07- 12/31/07: \$ 250,000
1/1/08- 12/31/12: \$3,500,000

POSITIONS REQUESTED (LIMITED SERVICE): This grant will support existing staff. As Commissioner Flood described in his covering memo, a major part of the funding of the vocational rehabilitation program is through federal grants. This grant is part of the continuing use of federal funds.

ANY ON-GOING, LONG-TERM COSTS TO THE STATE: None

COMMENTS: The Administration requests the Joint Fiscal Committee to approve receipt of the currently awarded \$250,000 for calendar year 2007, and the receipt of additional funds that may be provided through 2012 by a further award from the grantor for the same demonstration.

DEPT. FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT:
SECRETARY OF ADMINISTRATION:
SENT TO JOINT FISCAL OFFICE:

(INITIAL) [Signature]
(INITIAL) [Signature]
(DATE) 2/5/07



STATE OF VERMONT
 REQUEST FOR GRANT ACCEPTANCE
 (USE ADDITIONAL SHEETS AS NEEDED)

1. Agency: Agency of Human Services
2. Department: Department of Disabilities Aging and Independent Living
3. Program: Vocational Rehabilitation

4. Legal Title of Grant: Vermont Youth Transition Demonstration
5. Federal Catalog No.: Not Available
6. Grantor and Office Address: Mathematica Policy Research Inc.
 600 Maryland Ave, Wasington D.C. 20024
7. Grant Period: From: 01/01/07 12/31/2007

8. Purpose of Grant: (attach additional sheets if needed)
 This Grant is similar to several other grants currently received by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Please see the attached memo explaining the Division's plan for managing the similar grants.

9. Impact on Existing Programs if Grant is not Accepted:
 Please see attached memo explaining the Department's plan and relationship to other declining Grants

10. Budget Information:	(1ST State FY) FY 2007	(2nd State FY) FY 2008	(3rd State FY) FY 2009
EXPENDITURES:			
Personal Services	\$ 32,664	\$ 195,907	\$ 304,850
Operating Expenses	\$ 7,358	\$ 45,093	\$ 70,150
Grants	\$ 39,178	\$ 256,000	\$ 400,000
In Kind		\$ -	\$ -
Indirect	\$ 1,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 5,000
TOTAL	\$ 80,200	\$ 500,000	\$ 780,000
REVENUES:			
State Funds:	\$0	\$0	\$0
Cash (using existing staff and grants)			
In-Kind			\$ -
Federal Funds:	\$ 72,860	\$ 463,000	\$ 723,000
(Direct Costs)			
(Statewide Indirect)			
(Department Indirect)	\$ 7,340	\$37,000	\$57,000
Other Funds:			
(Source)			
TOTAL	\$80,200	\$500,000	\$780,000

Grant will be allocated to these appropriation expenditure accounts:	Appropriation No.	Amounts
	3460010000	41,022
	3460040000	39,178

Over

REC'D JAN 02 2007

11. Will grant monies be spent by one or more personal services contracts?

YES NO

If YES, signature of appointing authority here indicates intent to follow current guidelines on bidding.

x Patrick Flood

12a. Please list any requested Limited Service positions:

Titles	Number of Positions
DDAIL plans to transition nine positions created by JFC 2033 and 2139 to this grant through SFY07 and SFY08.	
TOTAL	

12b. Equipment and space for these positions:

Is presently available in
 Can be obtained with available funds.

13. Signature of Appointing Authority

I certify that no funds have been expended or committed in anticipation of Joint Fiscal Committee approval of this grant.

Patrick Flood 12/19/06
(Signature) (Date)

(Title) (Date)

Signature of AHS Secretary
AHS Dep. Sec.

Stacy Gold 12/26/06
(Signature) (Date)

(Title) (Date)

ACM

14. Action by Governor:

Approved
 Rejected

[Signature] 2/1/07
(Signature) (Date)

15. Secretary of Administration:

request to JFO
 Information to JFO

[Signature] 1-26-07
(Signature) (Date)


16. Action by Joint Fiscal Committee:

(Dates)

- Request to be placed on JFC agenda
- Approved (not placed on agenda in 30 days)
- Approved by JFC
- Rejected by JFC
- Approved by Legislature

(Signature) (Date)

TO: Reviewers of AA-1

FROM: Patrick Flood, Commissioner 

DATE: December 19, 2006

RE: Youth Transition Demonstration Grant

The attached grant sustains a broad Benefit and Vocational Counseling Program serving younger persons and adults with disabilities in the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation that has operated for the past eight years.

The following grid explains the four different funding sources Vocational Rehabilitation has used since 1999 and the current plans to sustain this initiative.

The **SSDI pilot** was originally approved by JFC in 1999 and then extended by a **SSA Contract** (JFO 2210 through 3/30/07- eight positions). This contract currently serves 600 disabled adults. VR has submitted a two year extension request and expect to have contract funding through 3/30/09. Only adults who receive Social Security Disability benefits may receive services under this contract.

The **RSA youth benefits grant** was approved in December 2001 JFC # 2033 with seven positions. This grant provides services to 300 youth per year. VR may serve any youth who receives a public benefit with these funds. This grant will end in September of 2007 and the VR plans to use the new SSA Youth transition grant to cover the staff and provide continued services to youth. The new **SSA Youth Transition grant** will serve 300 youth a year when fully operational. The new Youth Transition grant will only serve youth who receive Supplemental Security Income benefits. As a result about 30% of the youth served under the RSA grant will not be eligible for services under the new grant.

The recently submitted for approval, JFC #2280, **SSA Work Incentive Planning and Assistance Grant** covers services to adults and youth. VR will use this small grant to cover staff working in the above projects particularly with the time lag between acceptance of the new grant and the ending of the RSA Youth

Transition grant. This grant will serve 100 adults and youth per year This grant can serve youth and adults who receive either SSI or SSDI benefits.

The department also had a **grant from DET** to provide enhanced transition services for youth in four school districts, JFO # 2139 2/20/04. That grant will end September 2007. This grant serves 75 youth with disabilities a year. Youth served have either an IEP or a 594 plan. This grant provided started four projects in local school districts. Three of the school districts have found the projects helpful and plan to sustain them at the end of the grant.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation will use a combination of the WIPA Grant and the new SSA Youth Transition grant to sustain the broad youth and adult benefit counseling services, available statewide, developed over the past eight years. DVR will use the WIPA Grant, SSA Contract, and Section 110 funding to continue services to youth not eligible under the SSA Youth Transition Grant. DVR plans to cover the seven positions created 2001 (JFC 2033) and the two positions created in 2004 (JFC 2139) through SFY07 and SFY08 with these funds.

Funding for DVR Benefits Counseling

The following is a summary of the current funding picture for the DVR benefits counseling program. The attached table provides you with all the current and prospective funding for the DVR benefits counseling program.

Source of Federal Funds	Annual Amount and Term of Funding	Prospect for Continuation
SSDI Benefit Offset Pilot	\$550,000 per year Contract ends March 2007	SSA has informally shared their intention to continue the pilot beyond March 2007. No formal commitment has been made.
RSA Youth Benefits Counseling Grant	\$550,000 per year. Grant formally ends September 2006. Approximately \$320,000 of carry over will be available till September 2007	No prospect of extension
SSA Youth Transition Demonstration	Up to \$700,000 per year Start Date Spring 2007 End Date Spring 2012	SSA has selected Vermont as a pilot site and will provide \$250,000 for calendar year 2007. If successful SSA will increase funding to \$700,000 to 2012
SSA Work Incentives Planning and Assistance	\$75,000 per year Start Date September 2006 End Date August 2009	Vermont has been approved for a three year funding to 2009.

Total	Federal	State	non state match	Proration
32,664	32,664	-	-	
7,358	7,358	-	-	
39,178	39,178	-	-	
1,000	1,000	-	-	
80,200	80,200	-	-	
salaries	19,499	-	-	1/3
div overhead	6,340	-	-	1/3
0	-	-	-	
0	-	-	-	
fringe	6,825	-	-	1/3
0	-	-	-	
0	-	-	-	1/3
Contracts	-	-	-	1/3
travel	1,408	-	-	1/3
Equip/supplies	4,950	-	-	9/10
Training	1,000	-	-	1/3
other	-	-	-	
0	-	-	-	
VABIR	32,928	-	-	1/3
Case Service	6,250	-	-	1/6
0	-	-	-	0
0	-	-	-	
0	-	-	-	
Indirect	1,000	-	-	1/3
80,200	80,200	-	-	

Grant Year 1		Total	Federal	State	non state match
PS		97,991	97,991	-	-
Operating		12,725	12,725	-	-
Grants		136,284	136,284	-	-
Indirect		3,000	3,000	-	-
		250,000	250,000	-	-
PS	salaries	58,498	58,498	-	-
	div overhead	19,019	19,019	-	-
		-	-	-	-
	fringe	20,474	20,474	-	-
		-	-	-	-
	Contracts	-	-	-	-
		-	-	-	-
operating	travel	4,225	4,225	-	-
	Equip/supplies	5,500	5,500	-	-
	Training	3,000	3,000	-	-
	other	-	-	-	-
		-	-	-	-
Grants	VABIR	98,784	98,784	-	-
	Case Service	37,500	37,500	-	-
		-	-	-	-
		-	-	-	-
Indirect		3,000	3,000	-	-
total		250,000	250,000	-	-
		250,000		0%	250,000

October 31, 2006

Diane Dalmasse
Director
Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
103 South Main Street, Weeks IA
Waterbury, VT 05671-2303

Dear Ms. Dalmasse:

The Social Security Administration (SSA) and Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) are pleased to inform you that you have been selected as a pilot site for the Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) project. We greatly appreciate the time and effort that you have taken to provide the Mathematica-led evaluation team with information about your organization and your vision for an YTD project.

MPR will be in touch with you shortly regarding your participation as a pilot site. YTD pilot programs will receive up to \$250,000 in performance based payments, and details will be agreed upon in a memorandum of understanding. Five programs will conduct pilot programs through December of 2007 and ultimately three will be chosen for full participation in the YTD project.

We appreciate your interest in the YTD project and look forward to our collaborative efforts to serve youth with disabilities.

Sincerely,



Pamela Mazerski
Office of Program Development and Research
Office of Disability and Income Support Programs
Social Security Administration



Thomas Fraker
YTD Project Director
Mathematica Policy Research



State of Vermont
VocRehab Vermont
Department of Disability, Aging and Independent Living
103 South Main Street, Weeks IA
Waterbury VT 05671-2303
www.vocrehabvermont.org

Agency of Human Services

Phone or TTY: 802-241-2186
Toll Free: 866-879-6757
Fax: 802-241-3359

August 30, 2006

Tom Fraker
Mathematica Policy Research Inc
600 Maryland Ave., SW
Suite 550
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Tom,

It is with great pleasure I submit a revised concept paper for the Vermont Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD). We are very excited about this potential opportunity. I believe the State of Vermont would be an excellent site for Mathematica and the Social Security Administration (SSA) to test the YTD. I also believe that Vermont has the staff, the infrastructure and the interagency connections to quickly and effectively implement a strong demonstration.

The following are some things I would like to highlight regarding our readiness and capacity to implement the YTD:

- We have the key leadership staff in place ready to move ahead. If we are selected, Renee Kievit-Kylar will be the full time YTD Director and Katy Chaffee and Peter Burt are the Senior VR Transition Counselor and Lead VR Benefits Counselor respectively. They are all highly qualified and very experienced professionals who could hit the ground running.
- We have negotiated with the Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR) to increase the direct job placement component of the Vermont YTD. VABIR has also agreed to create a new position, the Youth Employment Specialist, specifically to meet the unique needs of youth served in the YTD. On VABIR's recommendation we have increased the proposed salary for this position to ensure we are able to attract high quality candidates.
- Using state administrative databases we have identified 1065 current and recent VR consumers who are youth on SSI who meet YTD eligibility. These young people are already engaged with VR and would be a ready pool of applicants for the YTD.
- We have a proven track record of implementing complex projects such as the YTD. Currently Vermont is one of four states implementing the SSDI Benefit Offset Pilot. *Despite being the smallest state involved, we have enrolled the most beneficiaries (432 in one year) of all the states involved.*

Thank you for the opportunity to be considered for this exciting demonstration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diane Dalmasse".

Diane Dalmasse

Director

Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



Draft Budget for Youth Transition Demo

Year One: January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2007

Personnel

One 0.40 FTE Project Director \$25,650

Two 0.20 FTE Benefits Counselors \$16,972

One 0.20 Lead Benefits Counselor \$11,951

One 0.10 Admin Support \$3,925

Total \$58,498

Fringe @ 35%

\$20,474

Total Personnel \$78,972

Operating

In State Travel: 5,000 miles @ 44.5 cents per mile \$2,225

Out of State Travel: \$2,000

Equipment: Two computers for VABIR Youth Employment Specialists (to be housed within DVR offices) \$5,000

Supplies: \$500

Training Funds for YTD Staff and VABIR Youth Employment Specialists: \$3,000

Case Service and Case Management Funds for Youth (\$1,500 per youth for 25 youth in 2007): \$37,500

Total Operating: \$50,225

Grants

VABIR Grant for YTD Youth Employment Specialists (YES)

Two VABIR YES Staff: \$60,000

Fringe: \$19,200
Mileage: \$9,000

Administrative Costs (including VABIR Directors time): \$10,584

Total Grants: \$98,784

Total Direct Costs: \$227,981

State Indirect

Indirect @ 9.7% \$22,019

Total Project Budget \$250,000

STATE OF VERMONT
PROPOSAL TO SPONSOR A
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
YOUTH TRANSITION DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

JAMES SMITH AND ALICE PORTER
VERMONT WORK INCENTIVES INITIATIVE

VERMONT DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITIES, AGING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING
VERMONT AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES



AUGUST 31, 2006

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State of Vermont Proposal for a Social Security Administration (SSA) Youth Transition Demonstration Project

Abstract

The SSA Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) seeks to test a group of SSI waivers for youth designed to promote employment and economic self-sufficiency. The SSI waivers include provisions to (a) delay the age 18 redetermination, (b) provide a \$1 for \$4 benefit offset, (c) expand the age range for the Student Earned Income Exclusion, (d) allow educational and career development goals under PASS, and (e) expand approved Individual Development Accounts.

SSA and Mathematica recognize that the waivers alone may not be sufficient to generate a significant impact on youth employment outcomes. There are many factors involved in the successful transition of youth with disabilities from school to adult life. These include effective school-based transition planning, access to job development and job placement services, and effective coordination between schools and adult service providers. Therefore, SSA and Mathematica intend to test the SSI waivers in combination with comprehensive transition and employment services. Combining the waivers with intensive and well-coordinated transition services will ensure the greatest possibility of a strong result.

The YTD requires both technical expertise and a good service infrastructure for the demonstration to be successful. The State of Vermont has in place the key components for a successful test of the YTD. These include:

- The technical expertise necessary to administer SSA waivers. Vermont successfully administered an SSI waiver from 2001-2004 and is currently administering a Social Security Disability Benefit Offset Waiver.
- The infrastructure necessary to deliver services to youth in transition. Vermont has a cadre of specialty transition vocational rehabilitation counselors who would be an ideal team to deliver the YTD intervention.
- An existing infrastructure for job development and placement services that can quickly be expanded and focused to serve youth specifically
- A well-established cadre of experienced benefits counselors available to support the waiver implementation.
- Longstanding referral networks and working relationships with local schools, community developmental disability and mental health providers, and youth and family advocacy groups.
- A well-established Planning and Evaluation Unit (PEU) with experience conducting random assignment design evaluations. The PEU also has access to key state administrative databases including the Unemployment Insurance Reporting System, and the Vermont Social Welfare and Medicaid databases.

Vermont will embed the YTD into the existing statewide service system for youth in transition. Specifically, the cadre of fourteen (14) transition vocational rehabilitation counselors (12 FTEs) will be the primary team of staff delivering the intervention. The transition vocational rehabilitation counselors are located statewide and serve the

majority of Vermont high schools. They will recruit youth for the project, provide direct vocational services, arrange for and fund job placement services and coordinate with schools and adult service providers. YTD resources will be used to provide enhanced vocational options to the YTD intervention group that may not otherwise be available in the system. These would include:

- Individualized real employment experiences for in-school youth.
- Individualized job development and job placement in competitive employment for youth prior to graduation.
- Individualized employment placement and supports to youth who have exited the school systems.
- Employment-related case management supports for youth to address other issues that may undermine employment or educational plans.
- Enhanced vocational rehabilitation case services to support post-secondary education and training needs for youth.

These services will be provided in close coordination with all the systems serving youth in the state. As noted, the vocational rehabilitation transition counselors work closely with most of the high schools in the state. The Vermont Association for Business Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR)—the state's Project With Industry—will provide the bulk of the job development and placement services for youth in the intervention group. VABIR will create a specialized position, the youth employment specialist (YES), for this project to provide job development and placement services to youth in the intervention group. The eight new full-time YES staff will each be paired with one or two VR transition counselors to provide intensive one-on-one services to youth. VABIR has a statewide presence and provided job placement services to over 1,500 people in 2005. The Vocational Rehabilitation transition counselors will also closely coordinate with the state's supported employment providers for youth with developmental and psychiatric disabilities.

A team of ten (10) benefits counselors will support the transition vocational rehabilitation counselors. The benefits counselors will manage the implementation of the SSI waivers for the YTD intervention group. The benefits counselors will verify participant eligibility and conduct the informed consent procedures. They will ensure that youth participants fully understand the waiver provisions and track utilization on an established Vermont Work Incentives Initiative database. The database already has an existing mechanism for random assignment that can be adapted for the YTD.

The Vermont Work Incentives Initiative Planning and Evaluation Unit (PEU) will assist Mathematica as needed with the project evaluation. The PEU has worked with Mathematica around the SSA State Partnership Initiative evaluation, and has also conducted numerous other evaluations for the state including evaluations of the State Personal Assistance program, the Vermont Medicaid for Working People with Disabilities and the JOBS program for youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities. The PEU has access to a number of key state administrative databases that will be available for both the YTD intervention and comparison groups.

**State of Vermont Proposal for a
Social Security Administration (SSA)
Youth Transition Demonstration Project**

I. INTRODUCTION

Vermont has long recognized the promise of early intervention to encourage self-sufficiency among youth with disabilities making the challenging transition from school to adult and community life. Vermont's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) was an early adopter in establishing dedicated staff for transition counseling and benefits counseling services for youth who were, or were likely to become, Social Security beneficiaries. Vermont has also been a center for innovation in Social Security benefits policy, hosting several projects to encourage increased use of work incentives, expand work incentives through SSI and SSDI waivers, and test outcomes using objective data and research methods. For these reasons, among others, Vermont is very enthusiastic about the opportunity to sponsor a Social Security Administration (SSA) Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) pilot project.

Vermont's proposed intervention model offers some unique features in addition to the necessary elements outlined by SSA and Mathematica. These include:

- ✧ The ability to deliver the YTD waivers and enhanced services on a statewide basis, embedded into an existing and easily replicable service structure.
- ✧ Flexible services that can be customized to the needs and goals of each participating youth in the intervention group, and controlled delivery to minimize spillover effects on the control group.

Furthermore, Vermont has in place both the infrastructure, expertise and interagency relationships to facilitate a rapid and effective implementation of the YTD. This includes:

- ✧ The infrastructure necessary to deliver services to youth in transition including a cadre of specialty transition vocational rehabilitation counselors and a well-established cadre of experienced benefits counselors available to support the waiver implementation.
- ✧ A strong collaborative partnership with VABIR for job development and placement services, and a commitment from VABIR to create new youth-focused specialty ETS positions specifically for this project.
- ✧ Longstanding referral networks and working relationships with local schools, community developmental disability and mental health providers, and youth and family advocacy groups. As a result Vermont has a ready pool of potential participants from both the VR program and schools and community agencies.
- ✧ A well-established Planning and Evaluation Unit (PEU) with experience conducting random assignment design evaluations with access to key state administrative databases.

Before describing the specifics of the Vermont YTD approach it is necessary to provide a description of the current service system for youth in transition. As noted the YTD will be embedded into this system.

II. THE VERMONT SERVICE SYSTEM FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES IN TRANSITION

Overview

The Vermont human service system has a number of strengths that make it an excellent potential site for testing the YTD. The state has a longstanding commitment to community-based services and competitive employment. The state has no sheltered work programs and the state institution for people with developmental disabilities was closed permanently in 1995. The overwhelming majority of people in the disability service system receive individualized services in their own communities. Moreover, the state has always ranked highly in national surveys of supported competitive employment¹ and employment for people with disabilities in general.

Vermont also has a high rate of participation in SSA work incentive programs. The state has the highest rate of Ticket to Work participation in the nation. Vermont also ranks first in the number of SSDI disabled workers who have benefits withheld due to substantial work, and second in the number of SSDI disabled workers who have benefits terminated due to substantial work.² Finally, Vermont was ranked second in the per capita use of the SSA PASS option.³ Given the high level of participation in existing work incentive programs, Vermont is a good site to test the piloted work incentive provisions under the YTD SSI waivers.

While the Vermont system does well by many measures it also has a number of challenges. The limited resources and rural nature of the state means the service infrastructure is often weak or patchy. Services available in some of the state's larger towns are often unavailable in the more rural communities. Youth with disabilities face many of the barriers to employment that are typical for people living in rural areas. These include limited or non-existent public transportation, a small employer base, and limited job development and job placement services. They also include eligibility restrictions for long-term employment supports that sometimes exclude individuals with severe disabilities. This proposal will outline these barriers in detail and discuss how the YTD will attempt to address these issues.

¹ The State of Developmental Disabilities: 2002 Study Summary, Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities & Department of Psychiatry, University of Colorado, January 2004.

² Citation: Social Security Administration. (March 2006). Annual Statistical Report on the Social Security Disability Insurance Program, 2004. Rank calculated based on data from Disabled Workers Who Work Table 52: Distribution, by state or other area, 2004.

³ Social Security Administration. (July 2005). SSI Disabled Recipients Who Work, 2004. Rank calculated based on data from Blind and Disabled Recipients Table 2: Number and percentage who work, by state or other area, December 2004 and Other Work Incentive Participants Table 14: Number, by state or other area and provision, December 2004.

Vocational Rehabilitation System

Vermont's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has a very good record of serving SSI and SSDI beneficiaries in general. According to the Government Accountability Office, Vermont DVR was ranked number one, in comparison to other general VR programs, in the proportion of SSI and SSDI beneficiaries who achieve an employment outcome after receiving services.⁴ Vermont DVR also has the highest per capita rate of Ticket to Work participation of any vocational rehabilitation agency in the nation.

Since the late 1990s, DVR has made a major effort to increase and enhance services for youth with disabilities in transition. This is reflected in the overall rate of enrollment of youth, which nearly doubled between 1999 and 2005. In Federal Fiscal Year 2005, DVR served 2,664 youth between the ages of 14 and 25. Of these youth conservatively 532 were reported to be receiving SSI at intake.⁵ The primary reason for the increase in youth enrollment was the introduction of specialty VR transition counselors.

Transition Counselors

With the creation of the School To Career Transition Project in FY 2000, DVR initiated what was to be a major structural change to the core VR program in Vermont. The decision to move from generalist counselors to transition-specific counselors reflected DVR's judgment that youth in transition would be better served by specialized staff with specific focus and expertise.

DVR established the transition counselor position in an effort to improve the quality of VR services to youth with disabilities; improve outcomes for youth with disabilities; provide more effective outreach to youth with disabilities; and develop a body of expertise within DVR relative to youth with disabilities who are making the transition from youth to adulthood.

Transition counselors serve a critical role in helping youth bridge the gap between school and work, between child and adult service systems. They have a dedicated, youth-only caseload spanning the ages of 14 to 27. Formal services typically start 1-2 years prior to a student's exit from high school, but cases can be opened at earlier ages for students who have complex needs or are at risk of dropping out of school. The staff also serves out-of-school youth.

The program's scope is statewide. It has grown to its current level of fourteen (14) specialty transition counselors who serve all twelve (12) DVR districts. This staffing equates to 12 FTEs handling caseloads, with an additional .5 FTE set aside by the senior transition counselor for non-caseload related training, mentoring, and systems-level activities. It is anticipated that this number will increase by 1.5 positions within the next year, adding increased capacity in the Burlington and Brattleboro regions.

⁴ GAO Report to Congress, September 2005. Vocational Rehabilitation: Better Measures and Monitoring Could Improve the Performance of the VR Program. Vermont ranked number one among the states that had separate general and blind VR programs. Some states combine the general and blind programs so a direct comparison was not possible.

⁵ These data were self-reported at intake to the DVR program. It has been DVR's experience that these data underreport the actual number of youth receiving benefits. Comparisons with state administrative data suggest these data underreport benefits status by about 30%.

Each counselor is assigned three to six schools within her/his service area. Currently the transition counselors serve fifty-five (55) out of the sixty (60) high schools in the state. VR general counselors cover youth in the five (5) schools that are not served by transition counselors.

A recent formal evaluation of the transition counselor positions suggested the shift from general to specialist transition counselors has improved both the quality of services and the outcomes for youth.⁶ For example, transition counselors tend to engage youth and provide services much earlier than general VR counselors. This leads to earlier and more effective transition planning. Moreover, transition counselors have proven to be catalysts for improving coordination of services between schools and adult services for transitioning youth at the local level.

The Vermont Work Incentives Initiative (VWII)

Another innovative direction taken by Vermont DVR since the late 1990s was a concentrated effort to promote better understanding and utilization of benefits program incentives that encourage work. In 1998 Vermont DVR was awarded a State Partnership Initiative (SPI) grant by SSA. This grant allowed DVR to establish an ongoing Vermont Work Incentives Initiative (VWII) with a broad mission to encourage employment and economic self-sufficiency for SSI and SSDI beneficiaries.

The SSA SPI project established a statewide benefits counseling program for adults in 1999. The benefits counseling proved to be a very effective intervention. Data from the process evaluation suggested that beneficiaries were far more likely to understand and use available work incentives if they were working with a benefits counselor.⁷ The outcome evaluation of the SPI Project (conducted under the guidance of Mathematica Policy Research) revealed a significant association between earnings and access to benefits counseling.⁸ VR consumers who had access to benefits counseling were more likely to go to work and/or earn more money.

Based on the success of the SPI project the DVR VWII has been awarded other significant projects. Currently the VWII is implementing the following major programs:

- ✧ The Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Benefit Offset Pilot: A random assignment study testing the impact of \$1 for \$2 benefit offset built into the SSDI program.
- ✧ The State Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG): A systems change initiative designed to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities who receive Medicaid and Medicare benefits.
- ✧ The Youth Benefits Counseling Project: A statewide effort to provide benefits planning and assistance for youth in transition and their families funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

⁶ Evaluation of the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation School to Career Transition Project, September 2005. Judith Dickson and Erica Garfin

⁷ Vermont State Partnership Initiative Final Evaluation (2003): Tim Tremblay and James Smith.

⁸ The Impact of Specialized Benefits Counseling on Social Security Disability Beneficiaries (2004) Tremblay, T; Smith, J; Xie, H; Drake, R. Journal of Rehabilitation, Volume 70, Number 2

Youth Benefits Counseling Project

DVR anticipates the YTD will build on much of the groundwork developed by the Youth Benefits Counseling Project. The goal of the project has been to embed benefits planning and assistance into the transition process. Prior to the advent of the benefits counselors, there existed a huge information gap among families and professionals around benefits issues. Professionals and families often discouraged paid employment because of fear and misunderstanding about the impact of work on SSI and Medicaid eligibility.

The project established 5.5 full-time equivalent benefits counselors and one full-time supervisor. These staff resources were incorporated into a team of eleven benefits counselors and two regional supervisors to ensure the greatest geographic dispersion. Each of the eleven benefits counselors spent about 50% of their time working with youth in transition. They have worked with all the schools in their districts and partnered with the VR transition counselors.

Benefits counseling has been incorporated into the IEP and transition planning process. The benefits counselors also spend a significant portion of time providing general training on benefits to school staff and community agencies. This has helped change the outlook of many professionals and helped them understand the opportunities that the work incentives provide.

Since 2002 the benefits counselors have enrolled 660 youth in the project of whom 410 receive SSI benefits. This group of youth will be a natural source of referrals for the YTD project.

Other Major DVR Transition Initiatives

DVR has also sponsored a number of specific youth initiatives in partnership with schools and local communities. In addition to providing a natural source of referrals for the YTD, these initiatives created a solid collaborative framework for YTD by building relationships with schools, local employers, and community agencies. The resulting familiarity, communication pathways, and trust that have developed will be helpful when introducing the YTD random assignment study into local communities. These include:

Career Start Project: Vermont was chosen by the federal Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) as one of eight states nationally to receive a *State Alignment Grant for Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities Through the Use of Intermediaries*. The project is housed in DVR.

The goal of the project is to explore model approaches that create a community-wide system of inclusion, support and engagement for school age youth with disabilities as they transition into their adult roles in the community. The project funds four demonstration sites designed to:

- ☐ Increase the number of youth with disabilities making successful transitions to employment and post-secondary education;
- ☐ Increase employment experiences and career options for youth with disabilities;

- Prevent or reduce negative outcomes defined as involvement in the adult and juvenile justice systems; high school drop out rate; placement in institutional settings or psychiatric hospitals.

Project interventions are limited to four demonstration sites involving a local school district or high school. The interventions at each site differ substantially from each other in design and target population. However, all interventions were designed through a collaborative decision-making process that involved local schools, workforce investment boards, human services agencies, and community service providers. The project has also provided the impetus for improved collaboration and data sharing between DVR and the state education department.

JOBS Programs: The JOBS program is another highly collaborative effort led by DVR. With funds and planning oversight from DVR, Corrections, community mental health agencies, and the state foster care system, JOBS serves at-risk youth with emotional behavioral disabilities. At risk youth with emotional behavioral disabilities are a notoriously hard to reach population who tend to reject traditional mental health or employment and training models. The JOBS program reaches youth at the street level and uses work as the “hook” to engage young people. The program combines aggressive supported employment services with intensive case management services. The promise of real employment draws in the youth and allows the staff to then address their multiple case management needs. Youth served through the JOBS programs present a myriad of challenging issues. Self reported intake data from JOBS youth indicate:

- 54% are currently or have been under the supervision of the Department of Corrections
- 36% have been in Foster Care
- 53% have dropped out of High School
- 33% have been homeless
- 47% have serious alcohol and/or substance abuse issues.

JOBS programs are now operational in eleven (11) sites statewide. Most JOBS participants are also VR consumers. In 2004 JOBS programs served 275 youth with emotional behavioral disabilities. Approximately 30% were receiving SSI benefits. Despite the myriad of challenges serving this population in 2005, 189 of the 275 served became employed. This group will be a natural source of referrals for the YTD project. YTD will also benefit from relationships and data-sharing agreements established through JOBS.

The Youth and Family Advisory Committee: The Vermont Parent Information Center (VPIC) and DVR developed the Youth and Family Advisory Committee. Its membership is made up of youth in transition and their families. The mission of the advisory committee is to provide direction and advice to VPIC and DVR from a youth and family perspective. DVR anticipates that the Youth and Family Advisory Committee will be an active partner in the YTD project. The Committee could help the YTD craft the outreach message for the project. In particular this group could help DVR address youth and family concerns about participation in a random assignment study.

Employment Services

Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR)

VABIR is the State of Vermont's Project With Industry. VABIR is a non-profit community agency that provides job development and job placement services for about 1,200 people annually. VABIR is the only job placement service for people with disabilities with a statewide presence. They have an excellent reputation both with the business community and people with disabilities. VABIR has extensive contacts with the business community in Vermont. The organization currently operates four business advisory councils around the state. Approximately sixty businesses are active participants in the VABIR business advisory councils. VABIR is also co-chair of the Vermont Business Leadership Network.

DVR contracts with VABIR for job development services statewide and VABIR is the primary job developer for DVR and the primary contact with the business community. Currently DVR funds:

- Five full-time VABIR job developers for VR consumers.
- Eight and a half full-time equivalent Employment Training Specialists (ETS).⁹

The VABIR job developers are usually co-located in DVR offices and work hand in hand with VR counselors. While they are employed by VABIR, the job developers and ETS staff are supervised locally by the local DVR manager or VR counselors. The VABIR management provides training and technical assistance for the job developers and ETS staff. Currently, the VABIR job developers and ETS staff are generalists and work primarily with adults who are more likely to stabilize and succeed in jobs. VABIR staff are already overstretched and unable to devote energy to the kinds of job exploration, internships, and part-time and summer job experiences that most benefit youth in transition, particularly those still in school.

Department of Labor One Stop Centers

Vermont's DOL One Stop Centers provide generic employment services to the general population. Historically, there has been a high level of collaboration between DVR and the One Stop Centers to provide customized employment services for people with disabilities. This has included co-location of staff and blending of DOL and DVR services. DOL also provided youth specific programs such as the Summer Youth Employment program that have been extremely helpful. There are 12 DOL One Stop Centers around the state that mirror the DVR districts.

Unfortunately, DOL has experienced significant budget reductions in recent years and had to downsize services and staff. Some DOL One Stop Centers operate only part of the week because of lack of staff. DOL has had to cut back on the availability of more intensive services and focus on more generic job search services.

⁹ VABIR job developers tend to provide more general generic job development services for a broad DVR caseload. ETS staff tend to provide more individualized job development and job placement supports for consumers who have more significant needs. They may also provide some onsite job supports.

On the positive side, DOL currently has eight Disability Navigators on staff. The Navigator's role is to assist people with disabilities access One Stop Center supports. They also have wider training in disability issues including SSA work incentives. DVR and DOL continue to work well together despite the resource challenges.

Education System

Vermont High School Transition Services

There are sixty high schools in the state of Vermont. Vermont high schools serve approximately 6,000 transition aged youth who have disabilities and are on IEPs or 504 plans. The schools are all locally governed and get the bulk of their funding from local property taxes.

As required by Federal Education Law and supported by State regulations, Vermont high schools work with disabled youth and their parents to create transition plans as part of the IEP process. VR transition counselors are a key resource in this effort. Not surprisingly, given their independence and the differing availability of resources, there is great variability in the scope and intensity of transition services provided by schools.

Some of the larger schools in the state (Burlington and Essex high schools) do have in-house vocational programs for students with disabilities. *However, these programs are the exceptions.* Most Vermont schools simply do not have the resources to provide such specialized services. As a result they tend to look to DVR to provide vocational services.

Many areas in Vermont have local Core Transition Teams which are designed to increase capacity at the local level to develop, provide, and manage an effective transition process for students. Membership on these teams includes high school special education staff, human services staff (VR, Mental Health, developmental services, etc.) and other community partners. These core teams have proven very effective in improving transition supports at local level. As of January 2006 there were thirteen (13) identified local core transition teams in the state. However, only nine (9) were active, covering twenty nine (29) of the sixty high schools in the state.

Vermont Department of Education (DOE)

The Student Support Team of Vermont DOE has made improving transition outcomes for youth receiving special education services a priority in their Annual State Performance Plan for 2005-2010. To reach this goal, DOE is expanding their training and technical assistance resources for schools, including:

- ❑ Staffing a full-time School Transition Consultant position within the Student Support Team to provide direct support to schools and inter-agency partners regarding transition issues.
- ❑ Providing statewide training on transition in collaboration with Vermont Parent Information Center (VPIC) and others.
- ❑ Developing a specific page in the IEP process devoted to transition goals, supports and services and training/technical assistance regarding the new requirements in IDEA regarding transition services.

In addition, DOE will be using a 2004 Federal Office of Special Education (OSEP) State Improvement Grant (SIG) to establish Transition Academies in three sites over three years. Eligible students will begin by taking an introduction to college studies course. Upon successful completion, they will be eligible to receive vouchers for further study and earn concurrent high school and college credit. The first pilot site will begin September 2006 in the Barre-Montpelier area. Although this initiative is promising and may eventually be offered to students statewide, it is still in its infancy and not likely to have a significant impact as a component of Vermont's transition system in the near future.

The Vermont DOE is also taking steps to implement a data collection system that will allow for the measurement of youth outcomes after they exit high school. This system is currently being developed and will be in place by the 2006-2007 school year.

Community-Based Long-Term Service Providers

Supported Employment for People with Developmental Disabilities

In Vermont, services for people with developmental disabilities are provided primarily through a network of fourteen community agencies. To be eligible for developmental services an individual must have a Full Scale IQ of below 70 and significant functional barriers to independent living. The bulk of the funding for services comes through the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living. The primary mechanism for funding is individualized Medicaid Home and Community-Based waivers. DVR also provides grants to twelve of the fourteen agencies for the up-front costs of supported employment services.

The Vermont developmental services system has a well deserved reputation for supporting individual competitive employment. There are no sheltered workshops or segregated work sites for people with developmental disabilities in the state. Employment at sub-minimum wage is not an accepted outcome within the Vermont system. Most of the community providers have well-established teams of supported employment staff. There is also a high level of collaboration between local DVR staff and local developmental services programs.

In 2005, the developmental services system supported 766 people in individual paid employment with an average hourly wage of \$7.35. This equals 37% of the working age adults who receive services. Vermont was ranked 4th nationally (Fiscal Year 02) in the number of people receiving supported employment as proportion of the total served.¹⁰

In 2005, 619 youth between the ages of 18 and 24 were served by the developmental services system. The overwhelming majority receive SSI benefits or are concurrent SSI/SSDI beneficiaries. DVR anticipates that this group will be a potential pool of participants for the YTD demonstration.

¹⁰ The State of Developmental Disabilities: 2002 Study Summary, Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities & Department of Psychiatry, University of Colorado, January 2004.

Supported Employment for Adults with Serious Mental Illness

The Vermont Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) program provides comprehensive wrap around services for about 3,500 people with serious and persistent mental illness in the state. The services are funded by the Vermont Division of Mental Health and provided through ten nonprofit community mental health providers.

Each of the ten CRT programs has a supported employment team that is partially funded by DVR. In recent years the CRT programs have moved to an evidence based approach to services and adopted the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model developed by Robert Drake and Deborah Becker.¹¹ Currently, the employment rate in the CRT system is at about 30%—significantly higher than the national average for this population which is about 15%.

Youth with psychiatric disabilities tend not to transition directly to CRT program services from high school. Generally, younger people do not meet the eligibility requirements for CRT because they have not had their first major psychiatric episode that would indicate severe mental illness. Furthermore, youth with pre-morbid psychiatric symptoms are more likely to be served through the JOBS programs that are designed specifically for young people. However, it is possible that some individuals in the CRT program in the 21 to 25 age range may be potential candidates for the YTD.

III. GAPS IN THE CURRENT SYSTEM FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES IN TRANSITION

As noted in the prior overview, Vermont's service system has many strengths that will facilitate a strong test of the YTD. However, there are some key gaps in the system that can severely undermine opportunities for employment for youth in transition. The Vermont YTD will attempt to target resources towards these gaps in the system.

Not all youth in transition are served by VR Transition Counselors

Now that VR's School to Career Transition Program has expanded to serve all districts in the state, youth who are in school at the time they begin VR services are generally assigned to specialty transition counselors. However, transition-age youth who are out of school are likely to be served by a general counselor rather than transition counselor. In large part this is due to capacity limitations and the need to prioritize services to youth in school, but DVR believes all youth under age 25 would benefit from having access to specialized transition counseling services. DVR has long recognized that youth in transition present unique challenges for the counselor, requiring more outreach, engagement, and follow-up, as well as specialized knowledge of the developmental needs of this population. An independent evaluation of DVR's transition program also suggests that youth experience better outcomes when served by a transition counselor.

¹¹ A Working Life for People with Severe Mental Illness (2003), Robert Drake and Deborah Becker.

Schools have a limited capacity to provide real employment opportunities in the years prior to graduation

It has been well established in research that a prior work history is the best predictor of future employment. High school is typically when most young people have their first experience of real employment in part-time or summer jobs. This is the period when young people first begin to develop those soft skills so essential to successful employment.

Unfortunately, many young people with disabilities completely miss out on this crucial developmental experience. With a few notable exceptions, most schools in Vermont lack the resources or expertise to provide real competitive work experiences for in-school youth. A number of factors seem to preclude this from happening:

- ❑ The rural nature of the state and limited funding base of most schools means they cannot afford to pay for specialized vocational services.
- ❑ The training and education of school and special education staff does not prepare them to provide vocational services for students with disabilities.
- ❑ In some cases students have one-on-one aides who could conceivably also act as job coaches, but this opportunity can't be realized due to limited staffing, lack of expertise necessary to develop a community-based job, and restrictions that keep the aides tied to the student and thus unavailable to develop the job.

Schools also frequently underestimate the “employability” of students with disabilities and assume they can only function in volunteer or subsidized work settings. These types of employment settings are also easier to arrange and therefore often the option offered for students with disabilities. School staff and families sometimes discourage employment because of concerns about how earnings may impact the student's benefits. As a result, youth with disabilities often exit the school systems with little or no real employment experience.

Significant disability populations are not eligible for intensive employment supports available through local supported employment providers

According to DVR case records, about 50% of youth who receive SSI are not eligible for local supported employment services through the JOBS, Developmental Services or Adult CRT programs.¹² The Developmental Services system in particular has very restrictive eligibility criteria that exclude many youth with significant developmental disabilities. For example, a young man with a Full Scale IQ of 72 and cerebral palsy that limits his physical function would not be eligible for supported employment through Developmental Services. This would leave only DVR services. Under the current system, the VR transition counselor would not have resources to pay for the individual placement and support services this young person may need.

Significant groups of young people fall through this crack in the service system. These include:

- ❑ Youth in the Borderline IQ range

¹² Based on a query of the DVR RSA 911 database

- ❑ Youth with physical disabilities
- ❑ Youth with sensory disabilities
- ❑ Youth with autism or other pervasive developmental disorders
- ❑ Youth with traumatic brain injury
- ❑ Youth with psychiatric disabilities who do not meet the CRT criteria

Many of these young people require direct job placement and support services to be successful. Without those supports these youth remain unemployed or cycle through multiple jobs without success.

The lack of transition-specific resources often undermines transition planning and coordination between schools and adult service systems

Over the past two decades the state has made a number of efforts to improve transition planning for youth with disabilities. Because of the diffused nature of the school systems and local control, there is a great deal of variability between local schools in the quality and intensity of these activities. As noted earlier many schools and local communities have made valiant efforts to improve transition planning and coordination. In particular those communities that have developed local core transition teams have made a concerted effort to coordinate school and adult services.

However, the lack of *transition-specific* resources consistently undermines the good faith efforts of both school and adult service providers, particularly the lack of flexible money to help bridge any gaps in support between systems. Some examples of these gaps include:

- ❑ Youth with developmental disabilities who were employed prior to graduation have lost their jobs because the school withdrew the job coaching support in May and the adult developmental service provider was not funded to pick up supports until July of the same year.
- ❑ In some cases youth are accepted into a post secondary training program on graduation but have no access to transportation to be able to attend.
- ❑ Many youth with disabilities require adapted drivers education programs to be able to learn to drive. These adapted programs are generally not available through schools. The inability to drive in Vermont is a major barrier to employment.

In each of these cases a small investment of resources could have a major impact on the transition outcome. However, typically this type of flexible funding is not readily available.

Adult Developmental Services programs do not have the resources to provide employment services for recent graduates

Every year between 70-90 youth with developmental disabilities who meet the eligibility criteria for the Developmental Services system graduate from high school.

But local developmental service programs only have limited funds to serve the new caseload demand, so the local providers must use the Developmental Services System of Care Priorities to determine who gets services.

The System of Care Priorities are a set of guidelines local providers are required to follow when determining which recent graduates get services. The guidelines naturally place a priority on youth who are likely to go into crisis or become homeless if they do not receive services. *However, if a youth is employed at graduation and may lose their job without support, they automatically meet the System of Care Priorities.* This makes placement prior to graduation for this population crucial.

Due to tightening budgets at the state and local level, more and more youth with developmental disabilities do not get into the developmental services system. According to the Division of Developmental Services in 2004 and 2005 about thirty youth did not receive services after graduation because they did not meet the priorities. As a result they were bounced back to the VR program that lacks the job placement and supports they need.

**Flexible case management supports
are not readily available to address other
issues that preclude successful employment**

For a significant minority of youth it is not the job that is the problem, it is the rest of their lives. The transition period is typically an unstable time in young people's lives. Other non-work issues undermine the vocational plans of some youth in transition. These can include:

- ☐ Self-care and independent living issues
- ☐ Time and life management issues (e.g. getting to work everyday on time)
- ☐ Money management and budgeting
- ☐ Alcohol and substance abuse issues
- ☐ Medical self-management
- ☐ Exploitation and abuse

If left unaddressed, these issues will ultimately undermine the young person's employment success.

IV. PROPOSED VERMONT YOUTH TRANSITION DEMONSTRATION INTERVENTION DESIGN

It is SSA's goal to test the SSI waivers in a transition environment that is most likely to yield a strong effect. As noted there are significant gaps in the transition system in Vermont, especially for youth not categorically eligible for long-term services. The project will guarantee access to the following services for all intervention group members:

- ☒ Individualized vocational rehabilitation services by a specialty VR transition counselor, regardless of whether the youth is in school or out of school at the time of referral.
- ☒ Individualized job development and job placement in competitive employment by a youth employment specialist prior to graduation.
- ☒ Individualized employment placement and employment or post-secondary education supports to youth who have exited the school system by a youth employment specialist.
- ☒ Enhanced vocational rehabilitation case service funds to support the employment, post-secondary education and employment training needs of youth in transition.
- ☒ Employment-related case management supports for youth to address other issues that may undermine employment or educational plans.

These interventions will be embedded into the existing service system. The VR transition counselors will be able to individualize and customize supports according to the needs of each individual. As noted in the barriers section, the challenges that undermine successful employment are diverse and highly individualized. No single program model will address every need. The Vermont YTD design allows the VR transition counselor to respond flexibly to each student’s needs. Furthermore, they will be able to combine YTD resources with existing school-based and adult programs and services to ensure the maximum result.

Overview of Vermont Youth Transition Demonstration Design

<p>Intervention Group 400 Youth on SSI/SSDI or likely to become eligible Intervention Enhanced Supports Access to SSI waivers Services of dedicated VR transition counselor with enhanced case services budget Access to YTD individualized job development and job placement services by VABIR youth employment specialist Access to YTD employment related case management services</p>	<p>Comparison Group 400 Youth on SSI/SSDI or likely to become eligible Comparison Supports Access only to standard work incentives Services from either VR transition or general counselor with standard case services budget Access only to standard job development and job placement services, if available Access to case management only if meet categorical eligibility through MH or DS systems</p>
<p>Transition Supports Available to Both Groups</p> <p>Youth-specific benefits counseling Access to JOBS supported employment programs, if eligible Access to developmental services supported employment, if eligible Access to adult CRT supported employment, if eligible</p>	

Mechanisms for Service Delivery

The VR Transition Counselors

The VR transition counselors are the natural cadre of staff to coordinate the Vermont YTD intervention (see position description, Appendix, page 1). They are the only staff in the system that have the responsibility for youth both prior to graduation and after they exit the school system. Most importantly they are the only staff in the system that have the authority to spend money on youth on both sides of the transition process.

The VR transition counselor model has proven an effective approach to serving youth in transition. The Vermont YTD project will enhance the impact of this service for intervention group participants by adding the following resources:

VABIR Youth Employment Specialists: The YTD will pair each VR transition counselor with a VABIR youth employment specialist (YES) to provide direct job placement and support for intervention group participants. This new position, which VABIR has agreed to create for the purposes of the YTD, will ensure that the special needs and issues surrounding job development and placement for youth are addressed by dedicated staff (see position description, Appendix, page 3). VABIR has further committed to establishing these as full-time positions, qualifying for benefits, at a higher paygrade than typical ETS staff, so that the YTD can attract and retain professional-quality YES staff. VABIR will also create a lead youth employment specialist position to supervise this new cadre of specialty ETS staff (see position description, Appendix, page 5). The YTD plans on having a total of 7 full-time YES plus a full-time Lead YES. This will allow the YTD project to provide a minimum of .5 FTE YES per VR transition counselor, with a higher level of coverage for counselors serving a large caseload or service area.

The YES staff will be available to provide job placement services for youth in the intervention group both before and after exit from high school and also to provide some supports for youth in post-secondary education. The additional VABIR staff resources will be particularly valuable for promoting competitive work experiences for youth who are still in school. The VABIR YES staff will work under the direction of the VR transition counselors. *The VR transition counselor will ensure the VABIR YES only works with youth assigned to the intervention group.*

The YTD will fund the VABIR YES staff through a sub-grant agreement. The YTD will develop and monitor the grant implementation. VABIR has the expertise and experience in providing job placement services and will be responsible for training the ETS staff. The lead YES will directly supervise the YES staff, holding regular team meetings for case review and peer learning among the youth employment specialists, following the same team practice model used by both the transition counselors and benefits counselors. VR transition counselors and YTD project director will be able to monitor the quality and consistency of YES services statewide and address any issues through monthly management meetings of the lead transition counselor, lead youth employment specialist, lead benefits counselors, YTD project director, and VWII director.

Enhanced case service funds: The YTD will provide additional case service funds for each VR transition counselor. *These funds will only be used for youth assigned to the intervention group.* Case service funds are the discretionary dollars available to each

VR transition counselor to pay for any goods or services that will assist a youth in achieving an employment goal. These funds can be used for a broad range of items or services including:

- ☐ Post-secondary education or training
- ☐ Adaptive equipment or tools
- ☐ Transportation costs
- ☐ Work clothing
- ☐ Licensing or certification for a particular profession
- ☐ Books or materials for post-secondary education and training
- ☐ On-the-job training subsidies

Currently, VR transition counselors have on average *\$500 per consumer* per year in case service funds. For the YTD Intervention Group the project will increase this amount to *\$2,000 per consumer* per year.¹³ The VR transition counselor will still spend these funds according to need. Some youth cases will cost more than this average and some less. However, the VR transition counselors will have a larger pool of funds to draw from for YTD intervention group participants. In order to ensure YTD funds are only used for intervention group participants, DVR will develop a separate authorization coding. By federal regulation DVR must attach all direct service costs to a specific individual. YTD funds will only be authorized for use for participants in the intervention group.

Specialized Vocational Case Management Funds: The YTD will create a set-aside of funds available for the VR transition counselors to purchase case management supports for intervention group participants. It is anticipated that DVR will contract with local community mental health, developmental services, and traumatic injury providers for this service. These services would be activated to address circumstances that are typically beyond the scope of a VR transition counselor or ETS. For example:

- ☐ To help youth needing assistance accessing stable housing.
- ☐ To address independent living skill deficits such as personal hygiene.
- ☐ To address budgeting and financial issues
- ☐ To help resolve pending legal issues such as unresolved automotive violations.
- ☐ To help the young person access alcohol or substance abuse treatment if needed.

The VR transition counselor will monitor these services and ensure the case management services are supporting the young person's overall vocational plan.

VR Youth Benefits Counselors

The VR benefits counselors will be essential to ensure youth in the intervention group have the information they need to take full advantage of the SSI waivers (see position

¹³ This dollar amount is an estimate. The actual amount set aside for YTD Enhanced Case Service funds will be determined when Vermont develops a budget for the project.

description, Appendix, page 7). As noted earlier, data from Vermont's State Partnership Initiative suggest there is a positive association between use of work incentives and employment rates and access to benefits counseling. *In fact, based on the state's prior research, Vermont would hypothesize that the implementation of the SSI waivers in combination with benefits counseling would be sufficient to yield a significant impact on earnings.*

The VR benefits counselors are a highly regarded cadre of professionals. They have considerable technical knowledge across the state and federal benefits systems. Half the benefits counselors have prior work experience within the state welfare and Medicaid programs. This is crucial because individuals on SSI and their families often receive multiple state and federal benefits (e.g. TANF, Food Stamps, Housing). All these benefits interact and are affected if one member of the household goes to work. Families sometimes undermine the work attempts of youth on SSI because their employment may affect another household member's benefit. *Therefore, the benefits counselor must help the whole family understand and manage their benefits across programs.* This can be a time consuming and delicate task, so it is essential that the benefits counselor be available to support transition counselors in this area of working with families around benefits issues.

In addition, VR benefits counselors have experience implementing an SSI waiver program under the SPI project, and they are currently administering an SSDI \$1 for \$2 Benefit Offset Waiver for SSA. They have practical experience in preparing participants for the random assignment process, including ensuring eligibility, obtaining informed consent, and following random assignment procedures. Also, the existing benefits counseling database and case management system could easily be adapted for management of the SSI waivers.

The VR benefits counselors will be paired with the VR transition counselors for the YTD. The VR benefits counselors will manage the following elements of the YTD process.

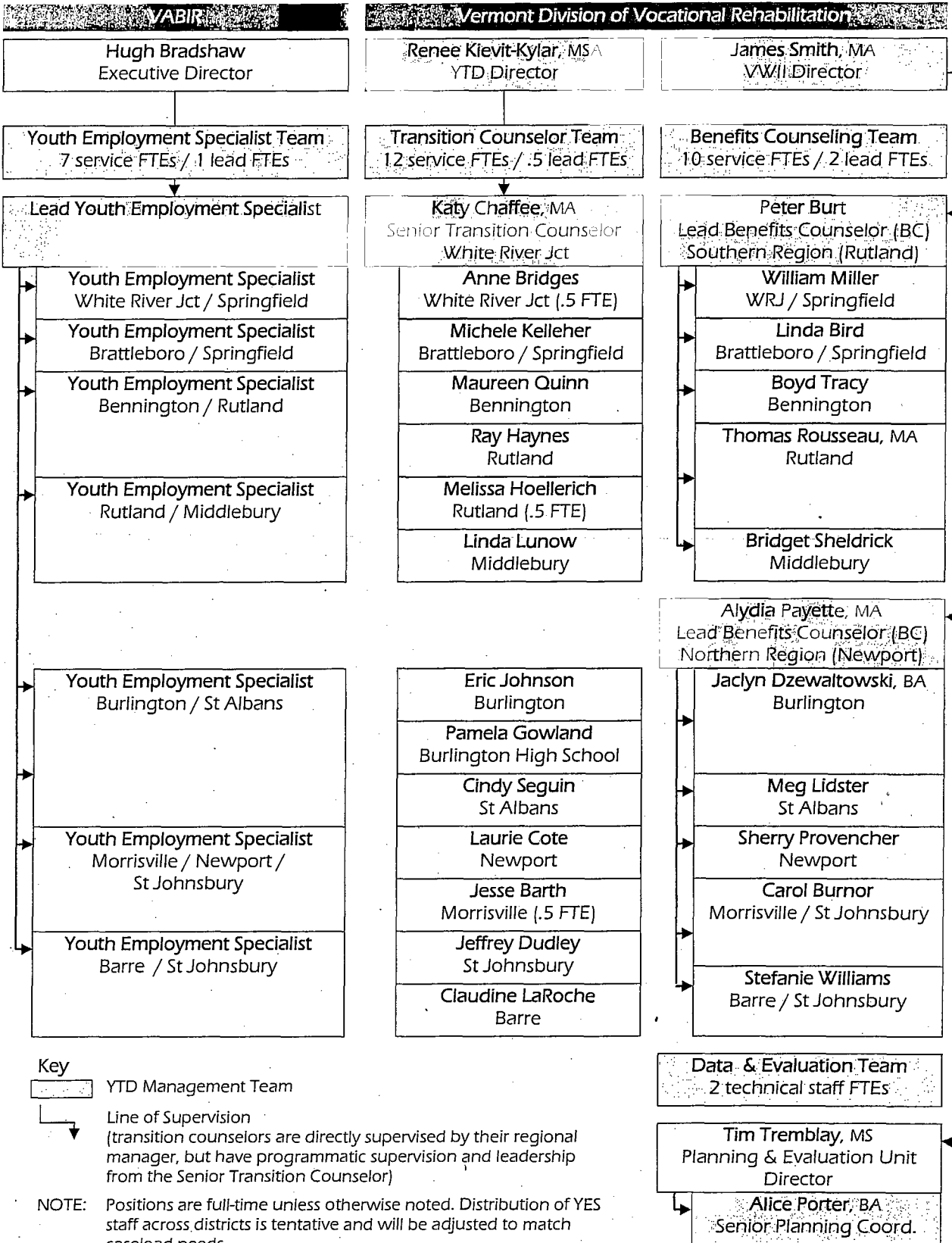
- ☐ Verification of eligibility
- ☐ Explanation of the SSI waivers
- ☐ Informed consent and random assignment procedures.
- ☐ Benefits advisement depending on group assignment for *both* the intervention and comparison groups.
- ☐ Coordination with local SSA staff around implementation of the SSI waivers.
- ☐ Assistance to the intervention group around reporting participation in the SSI waivers to SSA. For example monthly wage reporting, applications for PASS and Student Earned Income Exclusion, appropriate identification of IDA funds, etc.
- ☐ Tracking participation and use of waivers in the benefits counseling case management database.
- ☐ Benefits advisement to both the participant and family around other state and federal benefits that may be affected by employment and waiver participation.

Eligibility for Housing, Food Stamps, TANF and other benefits will be affected by increased earnings for participants.

Both intervention and comparison group participants will have continuous access to benefits counseling. There are both practical and ethical reasons for this decision. Firstly, a significant portion of the potential referrals for the YTD project has already received benefits counseling from the VWII project. In some cases benefits counselors will have had a two or three year relationship with these young people. It would therefore be impossible to control the “spill over” effect between groups in this circumstance.

Secondly, the introduction of the SSI waivers into the Vermont system will cause some confusion among beneficiaries. Beneficiaries can easily be harmed if they misunderstand the work rules in the SSI program. Therefore, to minimize potential harm the YTD will provide benefits counseling to both the intervention and comparison groups. The VR benefits counselors will ensure the comparison group members fully understand they are not eligible for the SSI waiver provisions and to plan accordingly. This will ensure both the intervention and comparison groups are fully informed of their benefits status.

Vermont DVR Youth Transition Demonstration
Organization Chart



Key

YTD Management Team



Line of Supervision

(transition counselors are directly supervised by their regional manager, but have programmatic supervision and leadership from the Senior Transition Counselor)

NOTE: Positions are full-time unless otherwise noted. Distribution of YES staff across districts is tentative and will be adjusted to match caseload needs.

Coordination of YTD Services with Existing Service Systems

A major part of the VR transition counselor's role will be to braid the YTD into the existing service infrastructure whenever appropriate. The VR transition counselor will know all the local service providers and resources available. They will use YTD resources to fill the gaps in the transition system or enhance existing services. The VR transition counselor will coordinate with the existing systems in the following manner.

Schools

The VR transition counselors currently work in schools with students generally one to two years prior to graduation. The VR transition counselor will be responsible for delivery of all YTD funded services for in-school youth. All YTD services will be considered part of the DVR Individual Plan for Employment. The teachers or school staff will not have any direct responsibility for YTD funds. *This is crucial because of the complications involved in special education mandates and law.* If school staff have direct responsibility for the YTD services then those services will fall under special education law. This would make random assignment impossible because group assignment could be challenged under special education law.

However, the VR counselor may braid YTD services with school resources. For example:

- ❑ The YTD-funded VABIR YES provides job development services for a student with a severe disability. The student has a one-on-one aide provided through the school. That staff person will act as a job coach when the VABIR YES finds the job.
- ❑ For youth in a career exploration mode, the VR transition counselor may provide on-the-job training funds to subsidize initial job tryouts with local community employers.
- ❑ The VR transition counselor may provide school staff with input on how a YTD participant's academic program could be modified to support their career goal.
- ❑ The VR transition counselor may fund specific vocational or aptitude testing to supplement school testing for YTD participants.
- ❑ The VR transition counselor may share costs for adapted drivers education for YTD participants with the school.
- ❑ The VR transition counselor may have VABIR YES identify summer jobs for YTD participants

In all of the above circumstances the VR transition counselor's interventions would be individualized and customized to the young person's goals and needs. The VR transition counselor would be careful not to fund services the school would otherwise provide.

The VR benefits counselor would also be working with the youth, family and school staff to ensure they understood and used the SSI waiver provisions.

Developmental Services Providers

The VR transition counselor will have a key role ensuring youth with developmental disabilities transition into the local Developmental Services program with jobs. As noted, if a youth is employed at graduation they are much more likely meet the Developmental Services System of Care Priorities to receive ongoing supported employment services. Therefore, the YTD services provided in school should help youth with developmental disabilities access long-term employment services.

However, even for young people who have been accepted for long-term supported employment services, the YTD can have an important supplemental impact. The VR transition counselor will be able to make available the enhanced case service funds and case management resources for youth in the intervention group. For example, YTD resources could be used to:

- ✧ Subsidize the first month's wages (on-the-job training) for a competitive placement to cover the employer's additional training costs. After a month or two, the subsidy would end and the youth would be paid by the employer.
- ✧ The YTD VABIR YES could provide specific job development for youth in the intervention group. The supported employment provider would provide the onsite support.
- ✧ YTD case service funds could be used in a variety of ways to support job placement (e.g. transportation costs, adaptive equipment, work clothes etc.)

The VR benefits counselor would also be working with the youth, family and developmental services staff to ensure they understood and used the SSI waiver provisions.

JOBS Programs

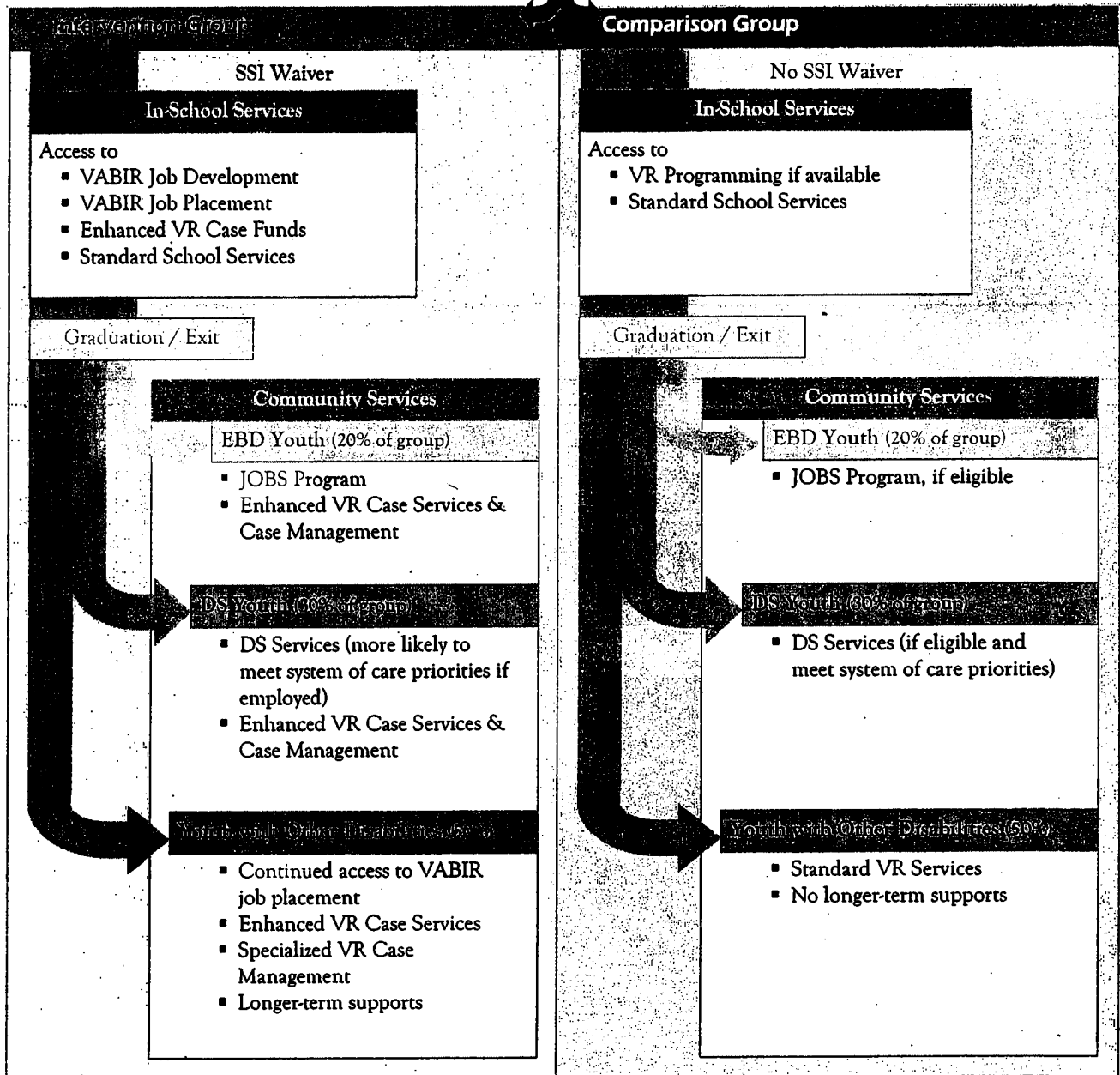
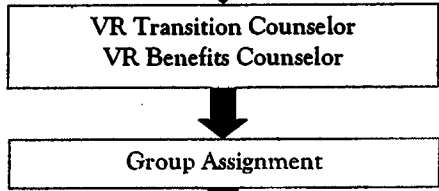
As for youth served through the developmental services system, YTD resources could be used to supplement the JOBS intervention. Unlike the developmental service programs, the JOBS programs are significantly under-resourced. Most JOBS programs have 2 or 3 staff serving 30 to 40 youth. Vermont anticipates that YTD resources could significantly enhance the JOBS intervention. The VR transition counselor may provide supplemental services similar to those identified under the developmental services programs. In addition this population may also benefit from post-secondary training and educational opportunities that could be supported through YTD.

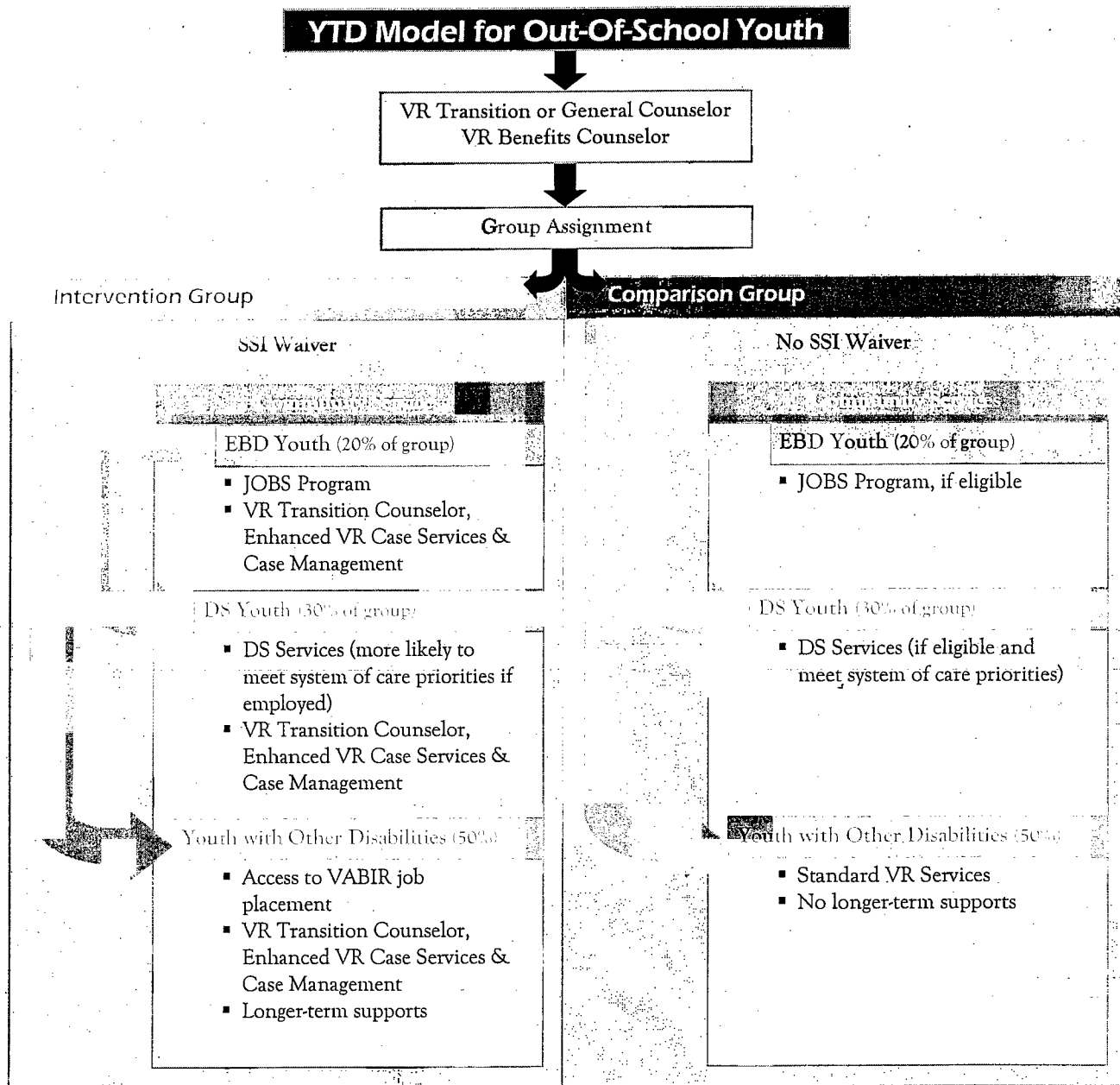
Youth not eligible for other services

It is important to note that approximately 50% of youth are not eligible or connected to other service systems after they exit the school system. For these young people DVR is the primary and only provider agency. *This may be the group where the YTD intervention could be expected to have the most significant impact.* Without YTD supports this group would have very limited access to direct job placement and on-site training supports.

The following diagram illustrates how the Vermont YTD intervention relates to the transition system as a whole:

YTD Model for In-School Youth





How YTD Services Will Differ for In School and Out of School Youth

The essential elements of the YTD intervention for youth will be the same regardless as to whether they are still in school or have exited the school system. The YTD intervention group will always have access to:

- ☒ DVR transition counseling and guidance
- ☒ Direct job placement and support services through the youth employment specialist
- ☒ Benefits counseling

- ☒ Enhanced VR case service funds
- ☒ Vocational case management
- ☒ The SSI waiver options

As noted, the YTD services will be delivered by the VR transition counselor, the youth employment specialist and the benefits counselor. In general the VR transition counselor will coordinate services, provide guidance and counseling and authorize use of the VR case service funds. The youth employment specialist will provide the direct job development and placement services and the benefits counselor will provide the benefits planning and assistance with SSI waivers.

However, how these services are provided will depend greatly on where the young person is in the transition process. The short term employment goal of a seventeen year old who is still in school will be very different from that of a twenty two year old who is self-supporting. Because YTD services are highly individualized, the variety of potential services and supports is very broad. Also, the YTD participants will have a wide range of needs and interests, so their employment goals will be equally varied. However, we do expect each component of the YTD services for in school and out of school youth to play out generally as follows:

In School Youth: The focus of the YTD team will generally be on preparing the young person for the transition. Since the youth will have little or no work experience much more time may be spent on assessment and career exploration. Also, all of the activities will have to be coordinated with the school program. However, the long term focus will always be on competitive employment after graduation. Every effort will be made to ensure all youth in the intervention group are either employed on graduation or placed in post secondary education or training. Services and supports may include the following:

- ☒ Arranging for part-time paid work experiences or part-time competitive work in junior and senior years.
- ☒ Providing on-the-job training funds to facilitate job placement.
- ☒ Providing on-site supports in the work place as needed.
- ☒ Assisting the young person identify his/her job interests through interest inventories, career exploration and job shadowing.
- ☒ Depending on need, gathering, arranging and paying for medical, educational or psychological assessments that may inform and direct the employment search.
- ☒ Consulting with school staff around the young person's educational program and how it could support their employment or post-secondary educational goals.
- ☒ Exploration of post-secondary training and education options,
- ☒ Helping the youth prepare for independent living (i.e., paying for adapted drivers education).
- ☒ Working with the youth and family to help them understand how their benefits may change during the transition years and prepare accordingly.

- ☒ Assisting the young person utilize the available SSI work incentives including the waiver options such as \$4 for \$1 offset and the Student Earned Income Exclusion.
- ☒ Coordinating with adult supported employment providers such as Developmental Services prior to transition to ensure continued employment supports post transition.

Out of School Youth: The focus of the YTD team will be on employment or post-secondary training and education that will lead directly to employment. In most cases the YTD will attempt to move youth towards competitive employment as rapidly as possible. This may or may not include intensive assessment or career exploration depending on the needs of the young person. Some young people will be ready for immediate employment because they are self-supporting and really need the income. Others may need more guidance and support before moving towards placement. In most cases VR will be the young person's primary service provider unless they are connected to another adult service system (e.g., JOBS or Developmental Services). The services may include:

- ☒ Assisting the young person identify his/her short term and long term employment goals.
- ☒ Providing direct job placement in competitive employment through the youth employment specialist
- ☒ Providing on-the-job training funds to employers to facilitate placement.
- ☒ Providing on-site supports in the workplace as needed.
- ☒ Assisting the youth access post-secondary training or education and providing financial support as needed.
- ☒ Providing vocational assessment to assist the young person focus his or her employment search as needed.
- ☒ Paying for goods and services that directly support his/her employment such as tools, equipment, work clothes, etc.
- ☒ Assisting the young person develop a PASS if appropriate.
- ☒ Coordinating services with supported employment programs such as JOBS or Developmental Services if the young person is eligible.
- ☒ Assisting the young person take advantage of the available work incentives including the SSI waiver options such as the \$4 for \$1 offset, the Student Earned Income Exclusion and available Individual Development Accounts.

Illustrative Case Studies

The transition system is such a complex patchwork, it can be difficult to describe adequately how a particular intervention may improve outcomes. This is particularly true for the Vermont YTD proposal that seeks to implement an individualized approach to services rather than a "one size fits all" model. The following case studies

are intended to show how the YTD will function in three cases for youth with very different goals and needs:

Bruce

Bruce is twenty years of age and dropped out of high school three years ago. He has a Full Scale IQ of 73. Bruce also has a pervasive developmental disorder that significantly impacts his social and interpersonal skills. However, Bruce is not eligible for the local Developmental Services supported employment program because his IQ is too high. After exiting school Bruce's family helped him get multiple jobs, but none lasted more than a few months due to Bruce's inappropriate behavior on the job. Finally, a family member referred Bruce to DVR.

The VR transition counselor enrolled Bruce in the program. She quickly arranged for a comprehensive vocational evaluation for Bruce to determine potential employment options for him. Despite his cognitive and social limitations she determined that Bruce had fairly good mechanical skills. In fact, he was a huge NASCAR fan and volunteered in the pits at Thunder Road, the local stock car track. Next she assigned an YTD YES to work with Bruce. Bruce's limited social skills made it very difficult for him to find a job on his own. Therefore, the YES set about developing a position at a local auto repair shop that specialized in oil changes, and other routine car work.

The owner of the auto shop was initially skeptical of Bruce's ability to do the job based on his conversations with him. The VR transition counselor and the YES offered to use YTD resources to cover Bruce's first month's wages as an on-the-job training experience. The owner agreed to try Bruce out for a month with the option of hiring him if things worked out. The YES came on site periodically for the first few weeks of his job. The YES helped his supervisor understand the supervisory accommodations Bruce might need to be successful. The supervisor created a more fixed routine for Bruce that ultimately helped him become more successful. Bruce's lack of social skills were not a problem in this work environment as other staff worked with the customers.

Bruce's family was concerned that he would lose his Medicaid coverage and his housing subsidy if he continued to work at the auto shop. The VR benefits counselor explained to his parents that Bruce would continue to be eligible for Medicaid under the 1619B provision even if he zeroed out his SSI benefit (which would be unlikely with the \$1 for \$4). He also explained that Bruce was eligible for the Section 8 Mandatory Earned Income Deduction that would keep his rent at the same level for one year and only increase it by 50% of the normal increase the second year.

Joe

Joe was twenty years old and has Downs Syndrome. He was still in school and his mother was a strong and involved advocate for him. Despite constant advocacy from his mother, Joe's school in Burton had not been able to provide him with a part-time job. His whole IEP team recognized that Joe would not meet the Developmental Services System of Care Priorities unless he was working when he graduated that summer. Joe had a one-on-one aide, but that person was not available to do job development for Joe.

The IEP team brought in the local developmental services agency and the VR transition counselor into his next meeting. The VR transition counselor agreed to assign the YTD YES to work on developing a job for Joe. He would work with the school aide who would provide on-site

job coaching. The local developmental service provider agreed to provide training and supervision for the school aide around supported employment and job coaching.

The YTD YES developed a job at a local supermarket for Joe in February. He introduced the school aide as the job coach. Joe worked there successfully until May when he was scheduled to graduate. The developmental services agency applied for Medicaid Waiver funding for Joe based on the need to maintain his employment. However, the new funding did not kick in until July and the school could not pay for the aide after he graduated in May. The VR transition counselor agreed to use YTD funds to pay the aide's wages from May through July to continue Joe's onsite support. In July the developmental services agency hired the school aide as a job coach for Joe.

In the May transition Joe's family had difficulty figuring out how to get him to work. A retired neighbor agreed to drive Joe for a modest weekly cost. The VR benefits counselor helped Joe apply for Impairment Related Work Expense to cover some of this cost. The VR benefits counselor also set up a system to ensure Joe was reporting his earnings to SSA in a timely way to avoid any overpayments.

Elena

Elena was in a car accident when she was seventeen and suffered a spinal cord injury that left her a paraplegic. After five years of medical and physical rehabilitation and time spent adjusting to her disability she was ready to reconsider going to college. However, her family had used up most of their resources covering her medical bills and other expenses since the accident. She applied for DVR services. Initially the VR transition counselor did not consider her a candidate for the YTD because she received SSDI benefits only as a Disabled Adult Child (DAC). However, the VR benefits counselor raised the option of using a PASS to set aside her SSDI income to pay for college. This would then allow her to become eligible for SSI to pay for her living expenses.

Elena worked with her VR transition counselor to develop the PASS application. The VR benefits counselor explained to her how her \$721 per month SSDI needed to be set aside in a separate account to pay for college expenses. The benefits counselor made sure she understood that these funds could only be used to cover approved expenses as part of her PASS. He also made sure she understood she needed to keep track of those expenses.

Elena was accepted into an associates degree program in computer science at Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont. She had been living at home in Randolph but now needed to move. The VR transition counselor coordinated with the state personnel assistance program to ensure she continued to receive these supports in Burlington. While her PASS funds paid for most of her college tuition, the VR transition counselor—using YTD funds—helped cover the cost of a laptop computer and some additional school expenses.

As her first summer break approached Elena's VR transition counselor approached her about getting a summer job. Elena had not worked since before the accident and her transition counselor thought it would be good for her to get some work experience. The VR transition counselor referred her to the VABIR YES who helped her find a summer job at Resolutions, a mail order company in Burlington. Elena took and processed orders over the phone. The VR benefits counselor helped her request a Student Earned Income Exclusion because she was a full time student during the year. As a result her earnings did not affect her SSI benefit.

V. TARGET POPULATION AND OUTREACH PLANNING

According to SSA data there are 1,460 children and youth between the ages of 0-18 who receive SSI in the state. There are a further 1,218 youth and young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 who receive SSI. Based on these numbers, Vermont estimates that there are about 1,600 eligible youth in the YTD 14 to 25 target population age range. This does not include youth who will become eligible at age 18, when family deemed income no longer makes them ineligible. It also does not include youth who are likely to become eligible for SSI, but have yet to apply for benefits. Therefore there appears to be a sufficient pool of potential applicants for the YTD in Vermont.

As noted, the DVR transition and benefits counselors are very well networked throughout the schools and adult service providers. Regardless of disability type or needs, DVR (with a few exceptions) is involved in most transition plans for youth with disabilities. As a result DVR is well placed to offer the YTD to most eligible youth who are in transition. In addition, DVR is a funding source for almost all of the youth and adult community-based services, such as developmental service providers, JOBS programs and the adult mental health (CRT) programs. As a result DVR has ongoing and active involvement with these community-based providers.

However, even given DVR's strategic position within the transition system, implementation of the YTD would still require a well coordinated outreach plan. DVR would use its existing relationships across systems to ensure maximum access for eligible youth.

Outreach and Recruitment Plan for the YTD

For the Vermont YTD to be a true test of the intervention, the project must enroll a sufficient number of youth within the project timelines. The project will enroll a minimum of 800 youth (400 intervention and 400 comparison) over the three year enrollment window. To accomplish this goal, the Vermont YTD project will implement a series of complementary and overlapping strategies on a statewide basis. In general the Vermont YTD project will rely on the existing infrastructure of staff and services (VR transition counselors, school staff, community based agencies and supported employment providers) to engage youth rather than creating new structures. We believe this will be most effective because:

- ☐ Youth and families are more likely to be responsive to staff they know and with whom they have an existing relationship. A young person is much more likely to be receptive to a VR transition counselor who they know and trust, than a new staff person.
- ☐ Relying on established staff and service infrastructure will reduce the amount of ramp up time that would otherwise be necessary if the project had to hire and train new staff.

As noted already, the VR transition counselors and VR benefits counselors will handle the enrollment process and coordinate YTD services. VR transition counselors and VR benefits counselors work across systems (the schools, community providers etc) so are naturally positioned to recruit from across these programs.

The Vermont YTD project will use the SSA beneficiary lists provided by Mathematica to target and refine outreach and recruitment efforts. The project will cross reference the SSA beneficiary list with existing state administrative databases to identify where youth are engaged (or not engaged) in the current service system. This will significantly reduce the amount of time necessary to find eligible youth and determine where they may be being served.

The following section will describe how the Vermont YTD project will recruit YTD participants from each of the primary service systems in the state and engage those not connected with any service system.

Recruitment from the Vocational Rehabilitation Caseload 500-600 Eligible Youth Served Annually

At any given time between 500-600 youth who receive SSI are currently receiving services from Vermont DVR. In general these young people are likely to be excellent candidates for the YTD project because they have already expressed an interest in employment and vocational services and are engaged in the VR program. They will already have a relationship with a VR counselor and be likely to be responsive to YTD outreach efforts.

To maximize the enrollments from this pool the Vermont YTD will:

1. Provide training to all DVR field staff statewide on the Vermont YTD to ensure DVR counselors and other staff are fully informed about the project. All staff will also be provided with attractive and easy to understand outreach material regarding the YTD.
2. Use the SSA beneficiary list and the DVR 911 database to identify current and recent youth DVR consumers who may be good candidates for the YTD.
3. Based on the above data matching, provide the local DVR transition counselors lists of eligible youth. The DVR transition counselor in coordination with other local VR staff and the VR benefits counselors, will outreach to all eligible youth in the VR district.
4. The DVR transition counselor or DVR benefits counselor will make a direct contact with identified youth, preferably in person. While time consuming, direct personal outreach is likely to yield the highest rate of enrollments.

The Vermont YTD projects a high rate of enrollment from this potential pool of enrollees because they are already engaged with DVR. Conservatively, we project a 50% enrollment rate yielding a minimum 250 enrollees over the duration of the YTD.

Recruitment from Vermont Special Education Services 600-700 Eligible Youth

Special education services in Vermont are provided through sixty local and independent school districts. The DVR transition counselors currently are working with fifty-five of the sixty school districts. General DVR Counselors cover the remaining five school districts. As already described there is great variability in the scope and quality of transition services across school districts. Some schools really

“get it” and will actively embrace the YTD and encourage youth to participate, others will need much more engagement.

The Department of Education cannot share student specific data with the YTD. Therefore, the SSA beneficiary lists will be particularly helpful in allowing the YTD and VR transition counselors to target their outreach efforts. This will cut down tremendously on time spent “finding” eligible youth. Furthermore, it is this group, that will most likely benefit from the SSI waiver provision extending benefits even after the age eighteen redetermination may have found them not eligible. Therefore, it is critical the Vermont YTD is effective in outreaching to this group.

To maximize the enrollments from this pool the Vermont YTD will:

1. Provide general information on the YTD through state and regional special education directors meetings, listservs, newsletters and other forums.
2. The VR transition counselors will meet with local school staff to explain the YTD and provide attractive and easy to understand outreach material regarding the YTD.
3. The Vermont YTD will match the SSA beneficiary list by zip codes to identify which schools are serving eligible youth. The VR transition counselors will use this information to initiate direct outreach to eligible youth in the schools in partnership with school staff.

The Vermont YTD projects a moderate rate of enrollment from this potential pool of enrollees because the SSI waiver provision regarding the age eighteen redetermination and the \$1 for \$4 will prove attractive to youth and families. Conservatively we project a 30% enrollment rate yielding a minimum 200 enrollees over the duration of the YTD.

Recruitment from DVR Youth Benefits Counseling Program

400-500 Eligible Youth

Vermont DVR has been providing benefits counseling for youth in transition since 2002. Over 600 youth have been enrolled of whom between 400 and 500 are eligible for the YTD. The Vermont YTD will follow the same outreach steps as for youth served in the Vermont Vocational Rehabilitation program.

The Vermont YTD projects a high rate of enrollment from this pool of youth because they are already engaged with DVR benefits counseling services. However, there is considerable overlap between this pool and the VR pool of potential enrollees. Therefore, we only project 90 enrollees from this pool, over and above those enrolled from the broad VR program.

Recruitment from the Developmental Services System

600 Eligible Youth

The Vermont Developmental Services System provides a full range of residential, case management, day services and supported employment for adults with developmental disabilities. These services are provided by fourteen community based non-profit agencies statewide. According to the state agency that oversees this system, the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL), over 600 eligible youth are served by these providers.

The Vermont YTD will have access to the DAIL database to match with the SSA beneficiary list to identify which youth are served by which agencies. This data will allow the YTD to target outreach and reduce time spent finding eligible youth.

To maximize the enrollments from this pool the Vermont YTD will:

1. Provide general information on the YTD to developmental service staff and managers through state and regional developmental service provider meetings, listservs, newsletters and other forums.
2. The VR transition counselors will meet with local developmental services staff to explain the YTD and provide attractive and easy to understand outreach material regarding the YTD.
3. The Vermont YTD will provide the VR transition counselors the matched data identifying eligible youth served by the local developmental services provider. The VR transition counselors will use this information to initiate direct outreach to eligible youth in the programs in partnership with developmental service providers.

The Vermont YTD projects a moderate rate of enrollment from this pool of potential enrollees. A great deal will depend on the support and participation by the developmental services case managers and supported employment staff. However, local VR districts have strong relationships with the local developmental services providers and therefore we expect a high level of support. Conservatively, the Vermont YTD project anticipates a 20% enrollment rate for a total of 120 enrollees.

Recruitment from the Community Mental Health System: JOBS Programs and the Adult Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) Programs
200 Eligible Youth

The Vermont YTD estimates that about 200 eligible youth with psychiatric disabilities are served by either the JOBS programs or within the adult CRT programs. JOBS programs serve 'at risk' youth ages 16 to 22 with emotional/behavioral disabilities. It tends to be a transitional program for young people with less severe psychiatric disabilities. In contrast youth must have a major mental illness and a history of psychiatric hospitalization to be eligible for CRT services. CRT services are long term intensive mental health services and do not have an upper age limit.

Both the CRT and JOBS programs are managed through the ten designated community mental health agencies. However, the JOBS and CRT programs in each district are distinct, managed by different staff in different physical locations. As with the developmental service providers, the Vermont YTD will use the SSA beneficiary lists to match with the state administrative databases. This will allow the YTD to identify eligible youth served by the CRT and JOBS programs and target outreach accordingly.

To maximize the enrollments from this pool the Vermont YTD will:

1. Provide general information on the YTD to CRT and JOBS staff and managers through state and regional provider meetings, listservs, newsletters and other forums.

2. The VR transition counselors will meet with local JOBS and CRT staff to explain the YTD and provide attractive and easy to understand outreach material regarding the YTD.
3. The Vermont YTD will provide the VR transition counselors the matched data identifying eligible youth served by the local CRT and JOBS providers. The VR transition counselors will use this information to initiate direct outreach to eligible youth in the programs in partnership with the programs.

The Vermont YTD projects a moderate rate of enrollment from these pools of potential enrollees. Many of the youth served by JOBS and CRT are highly transient and often in crisis. Therefore, as a group they are generally difficult to engage. Therefore, the YTD projects a 25% enrollment rate for a total of fifty enrollees.

Recruitment of Youth not Engaged in the Existing Service System Number of Eligible Youth Unknown

Access to the SSA beneficiary lists will allow the Vermont YTD to outreach to eligible youth who are not currently engaged in any of the Vermont service systems. This group will provide the most challenges in terms of outreach and engagement. At the same time this group may also benefit the most from the individualized services offered by the YTD.

Once again the Vermont YTD would rely primarily on local and individualized outreach efforts to engage youth. Large and centralized direct mailings tend to have a very limited response rate, especially among youth. Therefore the Vermont YTD will rely on local and direct outreach efforts to pull in youth.

To maximize enrollments from this potential pool the Vermont YTD will:

1. Use the SSA beneficiary lists to conduct a direct mailing to youth. While the mailing will be generated centrally, the letters will be from the local VR transition counselor with a local address. The mailing will include attractive and easy to understand information on the YTD.
2. The VR transition counselors will follow up the direct mailing with at least one phone contact. Youth and families will be encouraged to meet with the local VR transition counselor to find out more about the YTD project.
3. VR transition counselors will host informational meetings on the YTD inviting eligible youth and families to attend. These meetings will be held in the early evenings with a meal provided to encourage attendance.
4. The Vermont YTD will contract with the Vermont Parent Information Center (VPIC) to provide family to family outreach about the YTD. VPIC staff provides advice and referral information to families statewide. Each year VPIC handles over 8,000 calls from youth and families seeking assistance. VPIC has a strong presence among families and is a trusted independent resource for families. As such VPIC is an excellent resource for referrals to the YTD.

It is difficult to project how many enrollees will come from this pool of potential participants. Therefore, the Vermont YTD projects a conservative enrollment goal of 90 youth.

Summary of Outreach and Recruitment for Vermont YTD

Service System	Approximate Number of YTD Eligible Youth ¹⁴ Served Annually	Projected Number of Youth to be Recruited for the YTD
Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation	500-600	250
Vermont Special Education Services	600-700	200
DVR Youth Benefits Counselors	400-500	90
Developmental Services System	600	120
JOBS Programs and Adult CRT Programs	200	50
Youth Not Connected to Service Systems	n/a	90
Total		800

We estimate that there are an additional 400-500 potential eligibles among closed VR transition cases who still fit the eligibility guidelines for the YTD and could benefit from the SSI waivers and additional supports offered through the pilot.

VPIC and the Youth and Family Advisory Committee

The Vermont Parent Information Center (VPIC) and DVR developed the Youth and Family Advisory Committee to advise DVR about services for youth. It is anticipated that the Youth and Family Advisory Committee and VPIC will have a large role in the YTD. VPIC is a youth and family run advocacy organization with a statewide presence. These groups will help DVR introduce the YTD to families and advocacy groups. Random assignment studies can create controversy within a service system and it will be important that DVR presents the YTD in ways that will engender support. VPIC and the Advisory Committee will help DVR craft its training and educational materials to be youth- and family-friendly. These groups will also help DVR address and resolve any concerns about the YTD that may emerge.

Furthermore, VPIC provides advice and support to families statewide through a network of advisors. In 2005, VPIC handled over 8,000 calls from youth and families. VPIC will therefore be an excellent potential source of community referrals to the YTD especially for young people who have become disconnected from the service systems.

Serving Youth At Risk of Receiving SSI Benefits

Vermont understands that SSA and Mathematica are interested in having the YTD serve youth who are not currently eligible for SSI but are likely to become eligible in the near future. DVR field experience suggests there are a number of youth who are not eligible at intake, but are likely to become eligible in the near future. Vermont would be interested in applying the YTD intervention to this sub-group. This would be consistent with Vermont DVR's commitment to early intervention strategies for youth

¹⁴ Because youth can be served by more than one system at the same time (e.g. Schools and DVR) these totals are not mutually exclusive. Membership of these groups will overlap.

with disabilities. However, the key challenge would be to identify accurately youth who may fall into this at risk group. The following section will discuss some of the potential options and challenges of expanding the YTD to this population.

It is important to note that the Vermont YTD is confident of achieving the enrollment goals of 400 intervention and 400 comparison enrollees without expanding the project to youth who are not currently eligible for SSI. We believe that the YTD outreach and enrollment plan clearly identifies how the project will identify, engage and enroll youth SSI beneficiaries.

However, if for unanticipated reasons enrollment is slower than expected the Vermont YTD may consult with SSA and Mathematica about expanding enrollment to youth who have applied for SSI benefits and found ineligible due to income or resources. We understand that SSA and Mathematica may be able to provide a listing of youth who have applied for SSI, but are not eligible due to family income or resources. While no medical determination has been made, it would be reasonable to assume that the youth and/or family members have reason to believe the applicant is eligible. It also maybe reasonable to assume these youth are likely to reapply when they reach age eighteen and parental income is no longer counted or after the young person has spent down his/her resources. Therefore, this group could be reasonably assumed to be likely to become SSI beneficiaries in the near future.

The Vermont YTD would use the SSA and Mathematica applicant data to target and outreach to youth in this group. The Vermont YTD could use the lists to match youth by school district to facilitate direct outreach. The project could also match this data to state databases to determine if and where youth are engaged in the service system. This would allow the DVR transition counselor to engage and recruit the youth directly (if they are not already DVR consumers).

In many ways this group may be excellent candidates for the Vermont YTD. A strong and early vocational intervention may divert some youth from ever applying for SSI. There is every reason to believe the Vermont YTD interventions would be effective with this population. As a result, they may move towards employment and economic self-sufficiency before they become habituated to life on benefits.

The Challenges of Screening Youth for Likely SSI Eligibility

The Vermont YTD has also considered targeting youth who may not have applied for SSI benefits but who may be eligible now or in the near future. This would also be consistent with the early intervention approach designed to engage youth before they become dependent on benefits. However, in thinking through the practical implications of implementing enrollment for this group, we identified a number of challenges that could not be completely resolved. These were as follows:

1. In order for the Vermont YTD to accurately identify this group, it would be necessary to create an adequate screening process. Such a process would have to be sufficiently rigorous to exclude youth who may not reasonably be expected to become eligible for SSI benefits in the foreseeable future. Vermont DVR is acutely aware that disability determination for SSA benefits is not a simple or easily replicated process. Vermont DVR has considerable experience assisting individuals apply for SSI and SSDI benefits and is very familiar with the

process. We believe it would be very difficult for the Vermont YTD to create a fair and valid process to screen youth for likely SSI eligibility. It would also require setting up an internal review structure that was sufficiently independent from the YTD staff to ensure objectivity.

2. The YTD services are likely to be in high demand. The YTD offers services that are not generally available in Vermont and therefore families and referral sources will advocate to have youth enrolled in the program regardless of their likely eligibility for SSI. This creates the likelihood that any screening process the Vermont YTD develops will be challenged through state appeals processes. Eligibility appeals would present a major distraction for the YTD and result in negative publicity for the project. This would take energy away from the primary purpose of the project, to provide a strong vocational intervention for eligible youth.

Therefore, on balance we do not think it would be wise to expand eligibility for the YTD to this group, unless SSA or Mathematica can provide an independent mechanism to determine likely eligibility. The Vermont YTD would be very willing to revisit this issue with Mathematica and SSA and consider alternative approaches that we have not considered. As noted, Vermont is very interested in early intervention approaches to helping young people with disabilities gain and maintain economic self sufficiency.

VI. DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION

Vermont DVR is unusual among State VR agencies in that it has an established Planning and Evaluation Unit (PEU) with the technical expertise needed to design and build data collection and reporting tools that support program implementation, ongoing management, and outcomes evaluation. The evaluation team consists of three full-time staff, Tim Tremblay (Contracts and Evaluation Coordinator), Alice Porter (Senior Planning Coordinator) and a Planning Coordinator (under recruitment). The PEU has developed and implemented several program evaluations in the state of Vermont. A number of these evaluations can be accessed at www.vwii.org. The PEU has also produced two research articles for publication. The PEU will support implementation of Mathematica's evaluation plan as requested, and may undertake additional analyses in cooperation with Mathematica. DVR will request prior approval for any public information or statistical reporting concerning evaluation of the YTD from Mathematica.

Data Collection and Monitoring Tools

The PEU has developed a case management database specifically for the state benefits counseling team, who will be managing outreach and enrollment into the YTD random assignment study. It is currently being used to implement the SSA \$1 for \$2 Benefit Offset pilot and could easily be adapted for the YTD demonstration. Specifically, the database has the following features:

- ☒ Sections designed to collect current benefits status, information on employers and jobs, and case notes.
- ☒ Tools to track outreach efforts and verify eligibility.
- ☒ A mechanism for centralized random assignment.
- ☒ Tools to track utilization of work incentive provisions.
- ☒ Links with state administrative databases.

All the above could easily be adapted for implementation of the YTD and tracking of SSI waivers for YTD intervention and comparison group members. We understand that Mathematica envisions having an online data collection tool for all YTD projects to use. The PEU has gained experience in supplying data to these systems, either by direct entry or coordinating transfers of data from our local case management system, through the SPI project national database managed by VCU and the DEEMS online reporting for the ODEP-funded Career Start Program.

Data Sources Available for an Outcomes Evaluation

Direct Report Data

The benefits counseling database described above will be a source for direct report data on youth who participate in benefits counseling services in either the intervention or comparison groups. The VR benefits counselors will also be able to collect demographic data and information on the youth's benefits status prior to random assignment, and can track their use of both standard work incentives and the YTD SSI waiver options. DVR understands that Mathematica is also interested in collecting survey data from YTD participants at intake, at one year post enrollment and at three years post enrollment. The VR benefits counselors are experienced in the challenges of tracking down youth for follow-up surveys, and will be available to assist Mathematica in collecting these data.

However, there are inherent problems associated with collecting direct report data from study subjects over a long period of time. For this reason, Vermont's YTD is fortunate to have access to the PEU's considerable resources of administrative data for both the management and evaluation of the YTD. In particular, use of administrative data will allow the YTD to negate the possibility of a reporting bias for the intervention group. Comparison group members have little or no incentive to provide direct data for the project after random assignment and therefore are less likely to report. Direct report data is particularly difficult to get from a youth population. Broad access to administrative databases eliminates that difficulty.

Administrative Data Resources

The PEU has data sharing agreements in place with several state agencies and has well-established routines for requesting and archiving data (in many cases going as far back as 1997) from these agencies on VR project participants. This existing structure can easily be adjusted to incorporate data collection for both the intervention and comparison group populations for YTD. The PEU's administrative datasets include:

The RSA 911 Database: This is the primary service and outcome database for the VR program. This database includes data on disability, employment goals, services provided, cost, and time in the system. This database will be the primary source of data on employment services for both the intervention and comparison groups. In addition, the RSA 911 database includes some outcome data on employment status at case closure, job type, earnings, and employer benefits. However, these outcome data are only collected at a single point in time, at case closure. As such the RSA 911 database is of limited use in a longitudinal study such as the YTD, where the evaluation is looking at sustained employment. However, the RSA 911 database may provide the evaluation with some additional qualitative information on employment outcomes such as job type and associated employee benefits.

The State Unemployment Insurance (UI) Database: The PEU has direct access to UI data reported to the Vermont Department of Labor. These data are reported from employers to the state agency for most types of employment in the state. The UI database archives data for three years prior. This will allow the PEU to collect valid employment data for intervention and comparison groups for at least three years prior to enrollment in the YTD. Because the UI system is mandated to collect data on all earnings directly from employers it is a highly reliable source of employment data.

The UI database does have some limitations. It does not count self-employment, some types of non-profit employment or out-of-state employment. However, these omissions will apply equally to both the intervention and comparison groups and therefore should not affect the validity of the employment outcome evaluation.

The State Department for Children and Families (DCF) ACCESS database: The ACCESS database includes all the state's social welfare and healthcare programs (TANF, Medicaid, Food Stamps, etc.). The PEU will use this database to track eligibility for healthcare and cash assistance programs. It will also be a useful source of information for screening eligibility of candidates for the YTD, and will be an important tool for the benefits counselors, particularly for managing benefits related to the SSI waivers.

Electronic Data Systems (EDS) Medicaid Claims database: The PEU also has access to the Medicaid eligibility and claims data warehouse maintained by EDS, the state's Medicaid claims administrator. In addition to allowing analysis of health care utilization patterns for both intervention and comparison groups, the EDS warehouse also provides some information on third party health care coverage.

State Department of Corrections Database: Unfortunately, youth in the YTD age range experience a high degree of involvement with corrections. According to a recent evaluation by the Vermont Department of Mental Health, about one third of males receiving special education services are incarcerated at least once, within three years of exiting high school. The PEU will use this database to track rates of incarceration and days incarcerated for both the intervention and comparison groups. This will allow a secondary analysis to determine if the YTD intervention had any significant impact on rates of incarceration for youth.

SSA Administrative Data: The PEU will have to rely on Mathematica for access to the SSA administrative data needed to assess the impact of the YTD on benefit status and benefit levels of intervention and comparison groups. The VWII evaluation team has worked with SSA data extracts provided by Mathematica in the past, and has

experience analyzing SSA administrative records as part of the SPI evaluation and the SSDI Benefit Offset Pilot.

Summary of PEU Vermont Data Sources for the YTD Evaluation

Data Source	Type of Information Collected
VR Benefits Counselor Direct Report into the VWII Database	Enrollment Date Assignment to intervention or comparison group Demographic Information Benefits Status Utilization of SSI Waiver Provisions
RSA 911 Administrative Database	Employment Services Provided Employment Service Duration and Cost Point in Time Employment Outcome Data at VR Closure
UI Administrative Database	Longitudinal Data on Employment Status and Earnings Pre and Post Enrollment
DCF ACCESS Administrative Database	State cash assistance and other public benefit program eligibility Medicaid and State Healthcare Program Eligibility
EDS Medicaid Claims Database	Medicaid and Other State Healthcare Program Utilization
Dept of Corrections Database	Rates of Incarceration Total Days of Incarceration
SSA Administrative Records	Benefits Status Pre and Post Enrollment

VII. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The YTD project management structure has been designed to promote quality assurance. DVR has a well-developed team structure for both of the disciplines involved in the YTD.

The transition counselors, senior transition counselor, and School Transition project director (who would serve as the YTD director) hold monthly in-person full-day meetings for training, peer mentoring, and case review. Together, they have created “Nothing But the Best! Vermont Transition Counselor’s Guide to Best Practices”, which they continue to refine. The benefits counseling team and Vermont Work Incentives Initiative director also have monthly full-day in-person meetings and a yearly retreat. In addition, DVR’s two lead benefits counselors provide the day to day

supervision of the benefits counseling staff, which includes routine review of cases and case files. The lead benefits counselors also periodically sit in on benefits counseling meetings to assess the quality of services provided. A similar team structure and meeting schedule is planned for the youth employment specialist team. Cross-disciplinary teamwork is also critical to the success of this project, and is already a well-established practice among VR's transition and benefits counselors and the VABIR staff, who are co-located in VR district offices.

The entire YTD service team can rely on a strong infrastructure of administrative and technical support staff to help them monitor caseloads and deadlines, identify missing documentation or data errors, and develop new case management reports and tools as needs are identified. Following successful practice with other VR SSA waiver projects, the YTD would hold regular monthly meetings of the YTD management team, including the YTD project director, Vermont Work Incentives director, senior transition counselor, lead benefits counselors, lead youth employment specialist, and administrative and technical staff supporting the project. These meetings would focus on project implementation, monitoring, systems level issues, quality assurance and case management needs identified by field staff. Discussions in this group could lead to new best practices, training development, outreach initiatives, case handling procedures, and database reports for case management purposes.

VIII. KEY STAFF

The following DVR staff have played a critical role in designing Vermont's proposed YTD intervention and will likely be involved in the implementation of the YTD project:

James Smith, MA, Director, Vermont Work Incentives Initiative: James has overseen the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's Work Incentives Initiative since 2000. This includes a statewide benefits counseling program for adults served through the VR and community mental health systems. It also includes a Rehabilitation Services Administration Systems Change Project designed to provide benefits counseling for youth in transition ages 16 to 27. The project is also working closely with SSA in the implementation of an innovative new \$1 for \$2 Benefit Offset Pilot for SSDI beneficiaries. This pilot will allow SSDI beneficiaries to work and earn above a substantial level and keep a portion of their benefits. This project has national implications for SSA and people with disabilities who want to work. Mr. Smith also served on the Adequacy of Incentives Advisory Group for the SSA Ticket to Work program in 2004. Prior to his involvement in Social Security and work incentive issues, James worked for fourteen years in the supported employment arena in Vermont and New York City.

Renee Kievit-Kylar, MSA, School Transition Project Director: Renee is presently the director of the Career Start Project in Vermont. In this position, she provides leadership at the State level regarding successful transition practices for youth with disabilities. While working directly for Vocational Rehabilitation, this includes convening and collaborating with State partners such as the departments of Education, Labor, Developmental Disabilities, Children and Families, and Mental Health; higher education; and many parenting, youth and advocacy groups. One of the main goals of

Career Start is to review information and data in order to identify trends/patterns, obstacles/gaps, promising approaches/model practices and to suggest strategies that will address these challenges. We are in the third year of this initiative and October, 2006 marks the final year of funding.

Renee's past experience includes: Assistant Director for the Special Education Team, Vermont Department of Education; Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Specialist for the Vermont Agency of Human Services; Director of the Washington County Court Diversion Program in Montpelier, Vermont; numerous teaching experiences including working with students with emotional and behavioral issues and severe learning disabilities. Renee holds a Masters of Administration degree from St. Michael's College in Vermont and is a graduate of the Snelling Institute for Leadership.

Katy Chaffee, MA, Senior VR Transition Counselor: Katy is the Senior VR transition counselor for the state. In this position, she provides leadership for the state's transition team and also directly serves schools, consumers and their families. For many years, Katy's career focused on community development and workforce training for marginalized populations. In addition, she worked in mental health, specializing in counseling with children, adolescents and families. Katy graduated from Lesley College with a master's degree in mental health counseling and holds a BA from University of California, Berkeley. She and Frank Lepore coauthored *Signposts, A Vermont Guide to Transition Planning for Students and Young Adults Diagnosed with Asperger's and High-Functioning Autism*, in 2003, presented at the National RSA conference, Washington, D.C. in June 2005. She is a member of the State Autism Task Force and the current RSA-sponsored Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (IRI) Primary Study Group: The Rehabilitation of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Tim Tremblay, MS, Planning and Evaluation Unit Director: Mr. Tremblay has overseen the DVR Planning and Evaluation Unit since 2004, supervising all core members of the staff and managing all reporting requirements, budget and contract monitoring, and all research and program evaluation activities. Prior to assuming this position, Mr. Tremblay was responsible for design and management of project databases, collection and processing of local, state, and federal administrative data, and research design and analysis. Mr. Tremblay is a primary author of two recently published journal articles¹⁵ featuring research done under the auspices of the VWII and MIG projects. His initial career preparation focused on the design and use of standardized psychological assessment instruments, and quantitative program evaluation in educational and mental health settings.

Alice Porter, Senior Planning Coordinator: Ms. Porter has primary responsibility for building and maintaining management information systems and analytical databases that support benefits counseling and other special DVR projects, including the SSDI Benefit Offset Waiver and Career Start Project. She also assists with statistical analysis and implementation of evaluations under the direction of Mr. Tremblay. As

¹⁵ The Impact of Specialized Benefits Counseling on Social Security Disability Beneficiaries (2004) Tremblay, T; Smith, J; Xie, H; Drake, R. Journal of Rehabilitation, Volume 70, Number 2 and Employment Outcomes Associated with Benefits Counseling for People with Psychiatric Disabilities (2006) Tremblay, T; Smith, J; Xie, H; Drake, R. Psychiatric Services (In Press)

the former Education Director of a statewide nonprofit providing benefits counseling for children with special needs, Ms. Porter also has considerable experience in desktop publishing, outreach planning, training production, and web design. Her combination of technical expertise with more than a decade's experience working with public benefits programs, health and disability policy, and the benefits counseling model equips her particularly well to support to the YTD project in both its service and outreach dimensions.

**Job Description —
Transition Counselor, DVR School to Career Transition Project**

Overview

Specialized counseling and casework duties at a professional level involving development, management, and delivery of services to adolescents with disabilities regarding the transition from school to adult life. Duties require intensive coordination with adult service agencies, area employers, school personnel, and families of students. Works in office and field settings under general supervision of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Regional Manager and/or senior counselors in each region. However, the senior VR transition counselor provides programmatic leadership and supervision of specialty transition duties, and conducts regular team meetings to facilitate training, case review, and peer mentoring.

Works independently and as part of a team implementing the School to Career Project, a legislative initiative aimed at improving transition outcomes for youth with severe disabilities, with special emphasis on services to unserved/underserved populations including, youth with severe physical and/or special health care needs; severe emotional behavioral disabilities, survivors of traumatic brain injury and youth with learning impairments who are not eligible for developmental or mental health services. A major part of this position involves working with a team of Transition Specialist Counselors, to establish a model for the implementation of long term supports, employment services and transition services to underserved populations.

Significant duties include carrying a specialized caseload requiring skills and expertise with the adolescent population, working with families, serving as a lead contact to high schools within the region to ensure a smooth transition from special education/504 services to Vocational Rehabilitation services and employment.

Examples of work performed

Conducts all intake interviews and determines eligibility. Appraises consumer interests, aptitudes, and abilities and develops Individualized Employment Plans (IPE's). Provides vocational counseling and guidance to students, including appropriate referrals to other service agencies. Monitors consumer progress towards employment and career goals and amends plan as needed. Participates in Individualized Education Plan (IEP/Transition Plan) team meetings to provide guidance and recommendations regarding IEP goals, objectives and vocational services. Contributes to the leadership and development of Local Core Transition Teams. Are members of the Local Interagency Teams.

Knowledge and skills required

- ✧ Extensive knowledge working with individuals with disabilities and transition services.
- ✧ Extensive knowledge of community resources related to transition.
- ✧ Familiarity with state/federal laws and regulations governing vocational rehabilitation and special education.
- ✧ Ability to communicate effectively and collaborate with other agencies.
- ✧ Extensive knowledge of casework duties, with the ability to prioritize tasks.
- ✧ Strong counseling, advocacy and supervisory skills.
- ✧ Strong planning, organizational skills

Minimum Qualifications

Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling; or in Psychology, Social Work, Special Education or Counseling.

Supervision received

Direct supervision from the VR regional manager and/or senior counselor in each region. Programmatic supervision from the senior VR transition counselor, with support and guidance from the YTD project director.

**Job Description –
VABIR Youth Employment Specialist (YES), Youth Transition Demonstration Project****Overview**

The YTD will pair each VR transition counselor with a VABIR youth employment specialist (YES) to provide direct job placement and support for intervention group participants in Vermont's SSA Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) project. The VABIR YES will be available to provide job placement services for youth in the intervention group both before and after exit from high school. The VABIR YES staff will work under the direction of one or more VR transition counselors but will be directly supervised by the lead YES and under the general supervision of the VABIR executive director. VABIR will train the YES staff.

The YES will provide a progression of work-based experiences for transition preparation for youth in the intervention group both before and after exit from high school. These experiences could include combinations of the following: career exploration; training in job seeking, interviewing, resume writing and other skills; job shadowing; volunteer work; internships; apprenticeships; paid employment; and exploration of post-secondary education and/or training options. The initial goal is that each youth will have paid work in their own community while still attending high school (including during summer breaks) and/or after exit from high school either due to graduation or leaving school prior to graduation. The ultimate goal is satisfying, competitive, long-term employment.

The YES will be part of a team that includes a DVR transition counselor and a benefits counselor. Additionally, they will provide a liaison function between employers, youth and their families, and the DVR staff (who already have an established relationship with the student's school).

Examples of work performed

Interviews and evaluates YTD youth to assess vocational skills and interests, with input from the VR transition counselor. Based on the assessment, creates a multi-year plan with the YTD youth and the VR transition counselor that includes a variety of work-based experiences, possible post-high school education and /or training and eventual employment. Implementing the plan may include: assisting in the development of a resume, job seeking skills and interviewing skills; arranging a job shadow, volunteer work, internship; arranging for interviews or furnishing with job leads; coordinating placement support such as trainers, interpreters and readers as appropriate; identifying the need for assistive technology and other accommodations; arranging visits and meetings with post-secondary education and training options including the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation; troubleshooting solutions to potential barriers such as transportation, school schedules, etc.; maintaining regular contact with the YTD youth while they are at their placement, and helping to resolve conflicts or provide additional training if it becomes necessary.

The YES also serves as a liaison with area employers and develops and maintains contacts with community businesses in order to establish relationships, learn area

hiring practices, job requirements, local business trends, special employment problems and communicate these back to DVR and youth. These contacts will help the YES identify and assist in developing work-based opportunities. In addition, the YES provides one contact point for and immediate follow up with employers to resolve any conflicts that may arise.

Attends regular team meetings with the VR transition counselor and benefits counselor to plan, evaluate and coordinate programs, services and activities, discuss individual cases. Collects relevant data and prepare reports as required.

Knowledge and skills required

- ☐ A desire to work with youth with disabilities
- ☐ Ability to network with a wide variety of people, specifically the business community
- ☐ Knowledge of the local community's resources
- ☐ Demonstrate initiative, diplomacy and sensitivity while dealing effectively with youth with disabilities, their families, employers, VR personnel and the education or business community
- ☐ General understanding of adolescent behavior and the role of the family
- ☐ Willingness to become familiar with the issues and needs of disabled youth
- ☐ Good writing and speaking skills
- ☐ Willingness to accept day-to-day direction from the VR transition counselor
- ☐ Ability to work as a member of a team with VR transition counselor and benefits counselor
- ☐ Have reliable transportation and willingness to travel as necessary within the designated geographical work location.

Supervision received

Direct supervision from the lead YES, under the general supervision of the executive director of VABIR. Day-to-day direction from the VR transition counselor. Support and guidance from the senior VR transition counselor and the YTD project director.

**Job Description —
VABIR Lead Youth Employment Specialist, Youth Transition Demonstration Project****Overview**

The lead youth employment specialist will oversee all youth employment specialists hired under the YTD pilot. The lead YES staff person will be responsible for coordination, direct supervision and training of the YES staff; will organize and oversee other statewide YES activities, particularly building connections and developing work opportunities with large employers; and serve as the liaison for the group to VABIR, the YTD project director, VR Central Office and the senior VR transition and benefits counselors. In addition, the lead YES may have a small caseload. The lead YES will be part of a state level YTD management team comprised of the senior DVR transition counselor, two lead benefits counselors, the YTD project director, and Vermont Work Incentives Initiative director.

Examples of work performed

Assists in the initial hiring and training of YES staff. Is responsible for supervision and ongoing professional development for YES staff including convening monthly meetings, finding appropriate tools and materials to assist in the work and trouble shooting obstacles that may emerge for individual YES staff. Develops and maintains a “Best Practices” guide for YES staff. Develops and maintains contacts with statewide businesses and business organizations to provide work-based opportunities for YTD youth. Serves as a liaison with VABIR, the YTD project director, VR Central Office and the senior VR transition and benefits counselors including regular meetings to evaluate and coordinate activities at the state level. Collects relevant data and prepare reports as required.

Knowledge and skills required

- ☐ Ability to network with a wide variety of people, specifically the business community
- ☐ Knowledge of statewide business/employment resources
- ☐ Excellent supervisory, organizational and administrative skills
- ☐ Excellent writing and speaking skills
- ☐ Experience in sales and marketing
- ☐ Creativity, the ability to “think outside the box”
- ☐ Ability to work as a member of a state level team with VABIR, the YTD project director, VR Central Office and the senior VR transition and benefits counselors
- ☐ Demonstrate initiative, diplomacy and sensitivity while dealing effectively with youth with disabilities, their families, employers, VR personnel and the education or business community

- ⌘ General understanding of adolescent behavior and the role of the family
- ⌘ Willingness to become familiar with the issues and needs of disabled youth
- ⌘ Strong leadership and supervisory skills
- ⌘ Have reliable transportation and willingness to travel around the state as necessary

Supervision received

Direct supervision from the executive director of VABIR. Support and guidance from the senior VR transition counselor and the YTD project director.

**Job Description —
Benefits Counselor, DVR Vermont Work Incentives Initiative****Overview**

Specialized counseling work at a professional level for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation involving counseling for the Work Incentive Project. Duties include ensuring that VR consumers have complete information on Social Security, welfare, housing and other benefits and of the effect upon them of earned income. Work is performed under the supervision of a lead counselor.

Examples of Work Performed

Advises VR consumers receiving Social Security benefits of the effect of employment on benefits received. Maintains knowledge of all public benefits programs in Vermont, including Social Security, welfare, and housing. In counseling sessions with consumers, provides analysis of potential impact on benefits of earned income. Provides written analyses to consumers and to their VR Counselors. Assists consumers and counselors in developing effective employment plans consistent with retention of benefits. Provides outreach and education on the goals and services of the Work Incentive Program to the general public and to other State departments. Promotes informed choices on employment with SSI and SSDI recipients, their families and advocates. Develops collaborative teams from among public agencies serving SSI and SSDI recipients to disseminate information of the Work Incentives Project. Participates in the development and implementation of the Project's research component and ensures that detailed data on each consumer is provided. Performs related duties as required.

Knowledge and skills required

- ☒ Considerable knowledge of counseling techniques.
- ☒ Working knowledge of a variety of public benefits programs.
- ☒ Awareness of Social Security disability programs.
- ☒ Ability to analyze large amounts of data and to incorporate the analysis into comprehensive reports.
- ☒ Ability to explain complex analyses to people of varying sophistication.
- ☒ Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.
- ☒ Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships.

Supervision received

Direct supervision from the lead benefits counselor for each benefits counseling region. Support and guidance from the VWII project director.