

Adult and Community Agencies

Special educators and families accessing community and adult agencies may feel like they have stepped into an overwhelming and complicated maze of new rules, regulations and requirements. Or, they may not have enough information to know where to begin. Special education services are mandated or required for all eligible students with disabilities. That is not the case in the adult world. While good services exist, the method for accessing these services is different from the school system. Adult and community services may have eligibility requirements, waiting lists and service gaps.

With declining resources and incredible demands on the community and adult service providers, partnership between the school, family, and agencies is critical. Early planning, intentional linkages to appropriate agencies and coordination of services are critical to the successful transition of students with disabilities to the adult world.

IDEA requires that a student's IEP include statements of transition services necessary to facilitate movement to post-school activities including continuing education, employment, and independent living, and describe services that will be provided by any community agency (300.43(a)). To accomplish this, with the consent of the parent, the district must invite a representative from any agency that is likely to provide or pay for transition services to the IEP meeting and take other steps to obtain participation of community agencies in the planning of transition services (300.321(b)(3)). These steps may include arranging regularly scheduled visits of agency representatives to the school, co-sponsoring agency nights for parents and students, sharing written materials with families, facilitating the referral process to various agencies, and arranging visits to community colleges and agency offices.

There are many agencies that serve youth and adults with disabilities. Some offer vocational and residential services, others provide personal support or financial assistance. The agencies that should be involved will vary from person to person depending on individual needs. A good starting place is to begin with the major state agencies. These agencies have services available throughout the state and the counselors will know of other resources available in your local area.

PRIMARY STATE AGENCIES

Colorado Department of Labor and Employment -- Workforce Centers

Workforce Centers offer numerous services including work registration, job referrals, career guidance and counseling, job data banks, interviewing and networking skills, resume writing, and assessment. The Centers work closely with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to obtain more intensive services that may be needed by clients with disabilities. Find the nearest Workforce Center in your local phone book or visit their web site at:

<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDLE-EmployTrain/CDLE/1248095319014>.

Social Security Administration

The Social Security Administration provides supplemental security income (SSI or SSDI) to persons who are disabled, fall below a specified level of income, and are unable to generate an adequate income through employment. Additional services include medical benefits through Medicaid. A youth with a disability can apply 6 months before they turn 18. The process can take up to a year. Visit the website at <http://www.ssa.gov>.

Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)

Vocational Rehabilitation assists individuals who have a physical or mental disability to enter, re-enter, or maintain employment and increase skills for living independently. DVR counselors can be helpful in linking clients with other agencies for support services that will enhance their ability to work. At this time, DVR does not have a wait list. The appropriate time to refer is when the student's focus shifts from education to employment and the student is available for services, usually during the last year of school. For students with more complex needs, it would be beneficial to work with a DVR counselor earlier for purposes of planning and service coordination. To find the nearest VR office, refer to your local phone book, call the state DVR office at (303) 866-4150, or visit their website at: <http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/dvr/index.htm>.

School to Work Alliance Program – SWAP

SWAP is an optional, collaboratively funded program between school districts and DVR. The program serves youth that have mild to moderate needs in employment, meet eligibility requirements for DVR services, and are likely to require short-term services to become successfully employed. Referral can be made through a DVR counselor or directly through a SWAP coordinator. To find out if SWAP is available in your area, talk to your special education teacher or contact your local DVR office.

Independent Living Centers (ILC)

Independent Living Centers provide a variety of services to persons with a significant physical, mental cognitive or sensory disability to help them function more independently in their home, workplace, and community. There may be a small fee for some services. To find the ILC nearest to you, call the state DVR office at (303) 866-4150 or contact your local DVR office.

Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) and the Community Centered Board System (CCB)

This agency is responsible for services for people who have a developmental disability, typically with an IQ score of 70 or below and adaptive behavior needs. The Division for Development Disabilities contracts with private not-for-profit agencies in local communities who are designated as community centered boards, CCBs. Each of the CCBs throughout Colorado has a designated geographical service area and offers a range of services including employment, residential, and community participation. Waiting lists for services can be very long. It is important for parents to add their child's name to the wait list at the age of 14 even if they are unsure about the types of services their child may need as an adult. Contact your local CCB or call the Division for Developmental Disabilities at (303) 866-7450 to identify the center nearest to you or visit the website at <http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/ddd/>.

Colorado Division of Youth Services (DYS)

The Division of Youth Services administers a statewide continuum of services and programs to assess, treat and control youth aged 10 to 21 placed in its care for delinquent behavior. DYS programs serve detained and committed youths. Services may be provided, as appropriate, to assist youth to transition back into their community, such as academic and vocational training, independent living, and employment services.

Division of Mental Health and Community Mental Health Centers

This agency serves persons with mental health needs through mental health centers and clinics throughout the state. An array of services is available to persons with major psychiatric diagnosis, chronic mental illness, or psychiatric emergency and their families. Mental health services are provided to persons with mental illness who are Medicaid eligible or who are without or have limited health insurance. For services nearest to you contact the state Department of Human Services, Behavioral Health Services at (303) 866-7400 or visit the website at <http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/obhh/>.

Colorado Department of Child Welfare – Chafee Independent Living Services

This program provides independent living preparation for youth who are preparing to emancipate from foster care services. Services are provided through county service coordinators. For youth who are receiving special education services, and are living in a foster care setting, efforts should be made to coordinate transition services with the student's case manager. Call (303) 866-5932 or visit the website at <http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/childwelfare.Chafee.htm>.

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

This agency is responsible for protecting and improving the health and environment for people in Colorado. Services are provided through local health departments and county nursing service agencies. Services available include nutrition, family planning, pre-natal care, drug and alcohol intervention, immunization, health management of chronic conditions, respite care, and transitioning from pediatric to adult services. Call (303) 692-2000 or visit the website at <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/division.html>.

Colorado Community College System (CCCS)

This state agency is responsible for secondary and post-secondary career and technical education. Services and support provided at secondary and post-secondary levels assist persons with disabilities to select and succeed in career/technical training programs. Each community college and vocational school has a Special Populations Coordinator or Disability Services Coordinator on staff. For information call (303)620-4000 or visit the website at <http://www.cccs.edu/>.

Post-Secondary Education System

Disability services providers at each community college, four-year college and university assist students with disabilities to select courses and obtain the supports necessary to succeed in the post-secondary education setting. Students must contact the Office of Disability Services at the college and provide documentation of disability in order to receive accommodations and/or services. For further information, contact your high school guidance counselor, special education teacher, or the post-secondary school you are interested in. Most schools now have web pages with basic information. Colorado Options: A Handbook of Post-Secondary Education Services for Students with Disabilities is available on the CDE website under Transition Resources at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/Options.pdf>.

Information about these agencies and other services in Colorado can be found by searching the State of Colorado website at <http://www.colorado.gov>.

Sample Questions to Ask

Once you have identified agencies that may possibly provide services to your child or student, the following questions may be helpful in gathering and clarifying the information you will need to make a referral. Based on the agency, and the needs of the individual, some questions may not apply.

Agency Name _____

What services does your agency provide?

What are the eligibility requirements?

How old does an individual need to be to apply for and receive your services?

Is there a waiting list for your services?

Is there a fee for services offered?

Do you provide vocational evaluation?

Do you provide financial assistance toward vocational training or post-secondary education?

Do you offer tutorial help?

Do you provide job placement?

Do you provide on the job training?

Do you offer individual or family counseling?

What information and documentation is required in order to apply for services?

What is my role and level of involvement?