

An Invitation to Communities to Help Youth In Transition (YIT)
Northwestern Counseling & Support Services

1. Describe the regional vision.

The regional vision for the Youth in Transition Grant has been developed through a series of meetings held with consumers of and representatives from the service agencies in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. These meetings began on 5/11/09 at Northwestern Counseling & Support Services (NCSS), with a youth panel discussion which included 10 youth in transition. In this meeting the participants completed a questionnaire developed by the Adolescent Services Program Manager Andrea Yandow. The questionnaire addressed their experiences with services available in the Franklin and Grand Isle community, access to these services **and** what is missing from our region. The ideas generated by the youth panel were used to create topics for our larger, all inclusive, carousel event.

On 5/22/09 NCSS hosted a day-long carousel event in which youth, family members, and professionals convened to brainstorm about identifying the services/programs and gaps that exist in our community. Carousel participants weighed in on the efficacy of existing programs, thought about how to augment what is already in place and prioritized the needs of the community. The carousel event grouped people into teams, each containing at least one youth participant with a mix of professionals and community members, which spent 10 minutes at each topic station. Participants rotated around the room from station to station. Topic stations contained a theme (such as *school to work*) and a question for each team to answer. The discussion at each station was facilitated by a team member and the responses were recorded on large post it notes. Once all of the teams had visited every station, we reconvened as a large group and evaluated the sum of the responses to assess applicable ideas vs. ideas beyond the scope of the Youth in Transition grant. Andrea Yandow compiled the relevant results. Three common themes emerged. The three recurring topics were: a lack of knowledge of services (consumers and professionals didn't know about many existing resources), inadequate transportation to reach transitional activities, and a lack of housing for transition aged youth.

On 6/11/09 NCSS hosted our first follow up meeting to the carousel event. NCSS invited professionals, family members, and youth. Despite our best efforts to spread the word about this meeting, there was a limited turnout. The NCSS Adolescent Services Team and one parent attended. Andrea Yandow facilitated this meeting and the group discussed the three hot topics. In this meeting we began talking about how to improve knowledge of services, transportation, and housing in our community. The main idea we discussed was developing a website as a means to inform people about the services and opportunities available to transition aged youth. We did not tackle the transportation or housing issues due to a lack of representation from partner agencies in our region.

NCSS held another meeting on 7/16/09 to continue the conversation about how to improve these aspects of our community's system of care. NCSS made a concerted effort to reach out to the community to get as many people involved as possible. The meeting included representatives from: Northeastern Family Institute, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Corrections, the Agency of Human Services, University

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of Vermont, the Howard Center and family members. Andrea Yandow went on personal leave at this time and Patricia Brett of the Department of Children and Families, who had collaborated with Andrea on the grant, ran this meeting. Many ideas were discussed; however, we only began to touch on the lack of knowledge of services, inadequate transportation and lack of housing. At this meeting Justin Philie became the Youth in Transition grant point person for Northwestern Counseling & Support Services.

The next meeting was held on 7/30/09 at NCSS. Representatives from Northeastern Family Institute, Court Diversion, Department of Children and Families and a family member were in attendance. Justin Philie facilitated the meeting. The point of this meeting was to focus the participants' thoughts on the three identified gaps in our community. There was an in depth discussion about the transportation woes of the Franklin and Grand Isle community. Participants spoke about the limitations of Green Mountain Transit Authority (GMTA) busses, which have very early run times. If youth are going to use a GMTA bus they often have to be at the bus stop before 6:00am. Anyone can utilize a GMTA bus which is positive aspect of the service. However, if a youth is facing the prospect of getting on a bus at 5:30am to make it to a job which starts at 10:00am they will not be able to sustain this schedule. GMTA also provides transport to medical appointments, but only to those on Medicaid. GMTA cannot provide transport on an as-needed basis for non-medical needs. So, making it to court dates, jobs, Adult Learning or the State Office Building is not possible unless time is not an issue. The group discussed the merits of buying a van but there were many concerns about liability. The group wondered about using volunteer drivers and we agreed to have a representative talk with Champlain Islanders Developing Essential Resources (CIDER) about how they find and manage volunteers. The team also spoke about the lack of knowledge of services. There was a consensus that 211 is not a widely utilized service. Justin spoke about developing a website to gauge whether this idea had support amongst the team. The team was not very excited about the idea of the website. Instead, people wondered whether we could hire a Peer Navigator or hire an Americorp Vista volunteer to spread the word. Housing was briefly discussed but there was a reticence to address this issue as it has been a longstanding concern in our community which has proven to be a daunting challenge. This does not mean that transitional housing shouldn't be considered. However, the amount of money available through the Youth in Transition grant is not sufficient to solve this problem. The funding could be used to assess the way money is spent on homelessness in our community.

Our final steering committee meeting was held on 8/19/09 at NCSS and facilitated by Justin Philie. NCSS reached out to consumers, family members, community members and professionals to offer one last chance to weigh in about how our proposal will be structured. The emphasis of this meeting, once again, was how to address the three identified gaps in our community's system of care. Talk quickly shifted to **who** would do the work to fill these gaps. Team members wanted there to be someone devoted to oversight of the Youth in Transition grant money. We did not want the work to fall on the shoulders of J.O.B.S. Case Managers as this would lessen the amount of time they could spend with clients, which would go against the purpose of the grant. We plan to hire a part-time Youth in Transition Manager. This person will work 20 hours weekly. Their

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tasks (for the first year of funding) will be: disseminating information about services and opportunities for transition aged youth throughout our community and writing a white paper about resources allocated to transportation and housing of transition aged youth in our community. The Youth in Transition Manager will use existing resources including: teen centers, health care facilities, social service agencies, and alternative school programs as forums to present pertinent information to youth in need of support. In conjunction with this, the Youth in Transition Manager will have a new venue to operate out of. NCSS will re-establish a drop-in center in downtown St. Albans. The drop-in center will allow the Youth in Transition Manager and J.O.B.S. Case Managers to reach youth who congregate in the downtown vicinity. Youth from across our region frequent downtown St. Albans, making it the most strategic place to establish a drop-in center. NCSS used to operate a drop in center downtown but it was moved to a more remote location due to the high cost of rent. Todd Bauman, NCSS Director of Family, Youth and Children Services, remembers the community reacting negatively to its relocation and the drop-in center was eventually closed.

The last step in our region's Youth in Transition planning process was meeting with the Local Interagency Team (LIT). On 9/9/09 Justin Philie met with the LIT at NCSS to review a draft of our Youth in Transition proposal. Our LIT includes: Dan Conder, Department of Children and Families Family Services Director, Tricia Brett, Department of Children and Families Juvenile Services Supervisor, Beth Hemingway, Director of Student Support Services Grand Isle Supervisory Union, Pam McCarthy, Agency of Human Services Field Director, Belinda Bessette, NCSS Clinical Coordinator, and Todd Bauman. Each member of the LIT was given the draft proposal along with the Review Sheet for Youth in Transition Regional Plans. They had until 9/18/09 to read the proposal, review it, and send comments. Only 2 members had suggestions about changes to the proposal. NCSS incorporated these changes into the plan.

Our ideal vision for youth in transition includes a community where we are able to intervene in their lives to divert them from the criminal justice system, instead providing them with the necessary supports to transition successfully into adulthood. We envision this occurring by increasing the awareness of programs and services available for transition aged youth. We will open a drop-in center to increase our exposure to youth who congregate in downtown St. Albans. The drop-in center will be a friendly environment where youth can come to talk, have a snack, and establish a connection with NCSS Adolescent Services staff. The drop-in center will be a site where professionals from various agencies can connect with youth. We will conduct an assessment of resources being spent on transportation and housing. This assessment will be used to inform the community about how much money is spent in the piecemeal approach to closing the transportation and housing gap in our area. The information gathered in the assessment will inform our efforts to develop a more cohesive transportation solution. It will also tell our community how much is spent on housing transition aged youth. Housing is a big issue in our region. The Youth in Transition grant does not provide enough funding to open a transitional living facility. However, throughout the steering committee process, an on-going discussion about housing has begun and having real data about the cost of housing will let us assess the possibilities of establishing housing. We

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could then work together to establish transitional housing if possible. Our hope is that through this grant funding, we can improve the systems in place, offer new services, and identify and address unmet needs for youth in transition.

2. Description of the services already in place for behavioral health treatment for Youth in Transition.

Northwestern Counseling & Support Services provides an array of community support to youth including:

- Jump on Board for Success Program (JOBS) is a collaboration between Vocational Rehabilitation and mental health. In this program, youth work closely with a youth employment specialist on career counseling on individual job development, promotion of self-awareness, development of job and social skills, problem solving, conflict resolution, and case management.
- Transitional Living Program Services (TLP) supports youth in finishing their education, finding a job, managing money, and getting an apartment.
- Youth Development Program (YDP) provides youth in DCF custody the support to achieve interdependent, self-supporting lives in their community upon entering adulthood, by helping them to develop goals and identify their strengths and weaknesses.
- New Connections is a service contracted through the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs (VCRHYP) to ensure that families have 24 hour access to finding healthy solutions and the prevention of youth from going into State's custody.
- The Franklin County Juvenile Drug Treatment Court gives young, non-violent offenders who admit to substance abuse issues the option to receive treatment instead of a punishment. A judge oversees each case and tracks each individual's progress.
- Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment offers therapeutic substance abuse assessment and counseling to teens.
- Family Assessment Team is an intake unit which works with families and youth in need of support and either helps them resolve their problems or refers them to appropriate in-house programs for continuing support.
- Project Soar is an independent alternative school run by NCSS. Project Soar works with youth with disabilities who are referred by local schools.

Other agencies in the community which offer services for youth in transition include:

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- *Franklin County Court Diversion* addresses unlawful behaviors, support victims of crime, and promote healthy families and communities.
- *Grand Isle County Court Diversion* unlawful behaviors, support victims of crime, and promote healthy families and communities
- *Northeastern Family Institute's Community Alternatives Program (CAP)* offers intensive clinical services to families to maintain the child in their current home and community in three ways. First, Clinical Wrap Around Services to children at risk of residential placement. They work with children in biological, adoptive, and foster homes to develop and maintain safe environments to grow. Second, CAP offers juvenile justice services that include Street Checking and Competency classes to promote successful completion of probation requirements and lower recidivism rates in the community. CAP also offers supports to post adoptive families to maintain those adoptive homes through case management, crisis support, and respite services.
- *State of Vermont's Department for Children & Families' Family Services Division* helps young adults between the ages of 18 and 22 to successfully transition from foster care to living independently.
- *Vermont Department of Labor* aids at-risk transition aged youth via the Workforce Investment Act which is a federally funded job training program.
- *Franklin County Caring Communities* promotes conditions to build healthy communities in Franklin County by supporting positive youth development and substance abuse reduction. They do this through a collaborative process that engages community members in dialogue and in identifying issues, connects members to resources and information, and recruits and equips members as community leaders.
- *Grand Isle Clean Team* The Grand Isle County Clean Team is a Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition established in 2005.
- *Teen Centers* exist in the towns of Swanton, St. Albans, Richford and Fairfield is in the midst of restructuring their Community Center which hosts the teen center.
- *Howard Center Substance Abuse Services* provides outpatient substance abuse treatment to adults in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties.
- *Alternative Education Programs:* The Augmentative Learning and Movement Center in Enosburg serves youth with Developmental Disabilities. Enosburg High School has the CASTLE alternative program that serves youth with Emotional Disabilities. Mississquoi Valley Union High School runs the LADDERS alternative program. Bellows Free Academy St. Albans has the Summit program

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for students with Emotional Disabilities and New Beginnings for youth with various challenges in need of a different learning space.

- *The Samaritan House* is a shelter which provides housing to people in need.
- *Adult Basic Education* helps youth with completing their high school education via their school completion program and their General Equivalency Degree (GED) program.
- *Department of Corrections* houses probation and parole and the Community High School.

3. Statement of remaining unmet needs.

Upon reviewing the services available to youth in transition in our community, the committee identified the following gaps in our community's system of care.

- Lack of Knowledge/Understanding of Available Services

There is a lack of knowledge, amongst both service providers and consumers alike, of the services available to youth in transition in our region. The statewide 211 hotline is viewed, locally, as not useful and has been called "too formal" for youth by committee members. Some families do not have regular access to the internet so existing web based resources (like the Department Of Labor Vermont Joblink website) are underutilized. Societal barriers and lack of resources (reliable phones, phone books, long distance phone service, etc) can keep parents or youth in transition from doing the research to seek out the services they need. Even service providers and educators in our community are often confused about or unaware of existing resources.

- Inadequate Transportation System

Transportation is a major issue for youth in transition and their families. Many of these families have older, unreliable vehicles and most youth in transition in our community have no vehicle at all. If a family does have a vehicle, it is often used to transport the parents to work and is unavailable for the youth in transition to use. In addition, many youth in transition and their family members do not have licenses to drive because of prior motor vehicle/criminal charges. Gas and car maintenance can also be difficult financially. There is major lack of safe, reliable, and affordable public transportation available to youth in transition, as well. Due to the rural nature of Franklin and Grand Isle counties, other methods of transportation are unrealistic (such as biking or walking) and unreliable transportation makes accessing available services (often located in city centers) a challenge. Transportation is one of the biggest barriers to job acquisition and retention for this population.

- Lack of Transitional Housing.

Homeless youth in transition have very little access to affordable and accessible temporary or permanent housing options. They frequently have no money to get an

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apartment, no viable references or both. Some youth are excluded from the local shelter due to criminal offenses.

4. Desired outcomes and possible indicators

Youth in transition will have knowledge of and understand the mental health services available to them in Franklin and Grand Isle counties. In addition, they will know how to access these services and will make referrals to their peers. An indicator for this outcome will be an increased number of referrals, and ultimately case loads, at the above listed local service agencies.

Youth in transition will have access to reliable, safe, accessible, and affordable transportation in all areas of Franklin and Grand Isle counties. An indicator for this outcome will be evidence that youth are missing fewer appointments at local service agencies and are able to retain jobs for longer periods of time.

Youth in transition are better able to access temporary shelter on short notice or to secure and maintain permanent housing. An indicator that this is happening will be fewer calls to crisis hotlines, fewer youth sleeping in cars, fewer young people at Samaritan House shelter (staying for shorter periods of time) and possibly a reduced crime rate in this population.

5. Description of priority services and strategies, indicating interagency agreements and methods for responsiveness to youth and families, public outreach, training, and implementation.

The committee envisions this grant as the beginning of a long-term collaboration between several local agencies to support youth in transition. We will utilize professionals and community members to form high functioning interdisciplinary teams and coordinated plans to meet youth in transitions' needs. We understand that the funding provided will serve as a seed to create a community model where local agencies work together to ensure that all youth in transition have access to needed services and achieve better outcomes. The time we have been able to dedicate to the planning process has not allowed us to produce all the answers we need to know how best to serve the youth in transition community. Therefore, we feel that the best use of the grant funding will be to hire a part time (20 hrs per week) employee to serve as the Youth In Transition Manager.

Preliminarily, this individual will develop a white paper by conducting an audit of current services offered in the community, highlighting duplication, increasing collaboration, and identifying gaps that may have been missed in the preliminary assessment. To address the lack of knowledge of available services, NCSS will establish a drop-in center located in a prominent, accessible storefront location in downtown St. Albans. The center will serve as a place to inform possible clients about the available services. The drop in center will also allow the YIT Manager to survey youth in transition on a variety of topics.

To address the lack of transportation, the YIT Manager will work with Green Mountain Transit Agency (GMTA), Champlain Islanders Developing Essential

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Resources (CIDER), Department of Labor, and the United Way to either establish a new system of transportation for this population or to increase accessibility to existing resources. Options to explore include the purchase and staffing of a van to transport YIT to and from scheduled appointments and jobs, improved use of a volunteer driver system, or providing vouchers for and increasing access to existing bus services.

The committee does not expect the YIT Manager to solve the housing crisis for this population. However, the committee realizes that housing is a serious issue which has existed in our community for some time. We would work with the Franklin and Grand Isle Housing Solutions/Continuum of Care to continue to evaluate the money being spent on inadequate housing solutions and work towards a more comprehensive approach to solving the housing gap. We share the view that is espoused in the Invitation to Communities which highlights the cost savings of having a client involved with JOBS rather than corrections. It costs more than 9 times as much to incarcerate someone than to pay for them to be involved with JOBS. We wonder if there could be a new approach to funding a truly innovative transitional housing project in which participants with certain minimum requirements could learn necessary life skills and receive services that would help stabilize their lives, becoming a stepping stone to a more permanent living situation. This would require extensive research into/evaluation of money being spent on housing support and services across all agencies in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties.

6. Management structure: The Youth in Transition Manager will be hired to work part time (20 hours) by NCSS. The hired employee will be overseen and managed by the existing steering committee.

Fiscal agent: Northwestern Counseling & Support Services

Administrative Contact Person: Todd P. Bauman, Director of Children, Youth, & Family Services, NCSS.

Evaluation Contact Person: Justin Philie will be the interim Evaluation Contact Person and this role will be assumed by the YIT Manager once they are fully oriented.

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Update Received 1/2010

Northwestern Counseling and Support Services and the Franklin and Grand Isle community would like to thank the State Youth in Transition Review Team for its input about our regional plan. Based on the outcome of our meeting we have made some changes to our original proposal.

We are no longer requesting 100% funding to establish a drop-in center in downtown Saint Albans. Our local YIT Steering Committee agreed with the State team that the cost of our proposed drop-in location was too high. Not only was the cost too high, but its sustainability came into question. We still see the value in creating such a space but we will approach it in a different way. We will use this year to explore whether we can create a drop-in center by forging agreements with the various public agencies and private businesses/citizens for in-kind donations of equipment, space, etc.

In our original proposal's budget the drop-in center cost 40% of its total. Since we are not using this share of the funding as we originally proposed we have decided to move the YIT Manager from a .5FTE to a full-time position. This would give the YIT Manager the time needed to reach out to youth, make greater connections with agencies, businesses and citizens. It will also assure they have the time needed to track data.

The YIT Manager will hold meetings at various locations throughout our community to spread the word about services and opportunities available to at-risk youth. They will interface with the J.O.B.S. program, NFI, Court Diversion, alternative schools, DCF, Franklin County Sheriff's Department, teen centers, Northwestern Medical Center, anywhere where there are youth in need of knowledge about services or connections to services. Cross system case management will be provided by the YIT manager and via referrals they make to the J.O.B.S. Case Managers. We plan to establish a network of youth throughout our community who will inform our Steering Committee to keep us abreast of what is and is not working for them. They will be our Youth Advisory Committee. We plan to tap into the established Youth Council at Project Soar (a local alternative school) as one means of netting youth representatives. We will also speak with the staffs of teen centers, service providers and community members to recruit youth who would make strong advocates. We plan to pay the youth via incentives which we will obtain through YIT funding. We will pay special attention to assuring that we capture the diversity of our community. We will actively seek youth participants from the Abenaki and Champlain Islands communities. The YIT manager will spearhead the creation of the Youth Advisory Committee. At the conclusion of our first year of funding we will have established the Youth Advisory Committee.

As in our original proposal, the YIT manager will be tasked with conducting an assessment of transportation and housing solutions for youth in our community. In the forums we held throughout the summer these two issues were recurrent themes—kids had a hard time getting to services and were concerned about the lack of transitional housing.

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Our hope is that through collaboration with the community our YIT Manager will be able to build more cohesive and efficient solution to closing these gaps in our system of care.