Discovering ME!

for Court-Involved Youth

Implementation Guide

Center on transition innovations
VCU

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Overview

Effective transition assessment and planning are critical to increasing students' employment outcomes, especially for those who face the most significant barriers to employment. Discovering ME! is a youth-focused, person-centered transition assessment and planning process. This process is designed to build early, customized work-based learning experiences for individuals with significant barriers to employment. The long-term goal of Discovering ME! is that all students find and maintain employment in careers that best match their strengths and contributions, interests, challenges to consider, and conditions for success.

About this guide

This implementation guide provides the "equipment" necessary to engage in the Discovering ME! for Court-Involved Youth process. This equipment includes an overview of recruitment, a description of all meetings for a Discovering ME! team, and all the documents necessary to facilitate and evaluate the process. The model has been piloted and refined throughout Virginia by experienced facilitators from VCU's Center on Transition Innovations (CTI).

Acknowledgment

The VCU Center on Transition Innovations would like to thank the Virginia Department of Education for their support and contributions to this guide.

For further information about the Center on Transition Innovations, please visit our website at centerontransition.org.

History of Discovering ME!

Discovering ME! was adapted from Marc Gold & Associates, process of Discovery (Callahan, 2016). The process of Discovery involves gathering information using a person-centered approach to guide the development of customized employment for adults with significant disabilities.

To assist educators in obtaining age-appropriate transition assessment information for school-age students with disabilities, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) endorsed the use of Discovery in 2012. During the 2014-15 school year, York and Loudoun school districts participated in training in Discovery and Customized Employment. At times, it can be difficult to translate the processes of traditional Discovery into school systems. In this case, the challenge of implementing an adult process with school-aged students proved to be too great.

In 2015, the VCU Center on Transition Innovations sought to identify needed adaptations to Discovery for use with school-age students. Initially, efforts were focused on high school students, but CTI soon discovered that starting in middle school allowed valuable transition and employment discussions and activities to occur while assisting with the transition to high school.

The streamlined process has been introduced in urban, suburban, and rural school districts across Virginia. Teachers have used interviews, observations, and portfolios to uncover the skills, interests, and contributions that each student can bring to a work-based learning environment and future job.

With permission from CTI, the RRTC: Transition at VCU collaborated with Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center to modify the Discovering ME! process. The revised process was piloted during the 2024-25 school year. This implementation guide is the result of that collaboration. It is intended to support youth with disabilities who are also court-involved.

How is Discovering ME! different from traditional Discovery processes?

	Traditional Discovery	Discovering ME!
Individual with a disability	An adult job seeker	A middle or high school student
Outcome of process	Match job seeker with customized employment opportunity	Build customized work-based learning experiences to enhance career development and transition planning
Length of process and intensity	Often completed within a couple of months/intensive	Extended over a year or multiple years/less intensive

Discovering ME! process

Discovering ME! for Court-Involved Youth (CIY) is usually coordinated by school staff. The process is intended for middle and high school students with disabilities, served in restrictive environments. The model consists of two meetings, focusing on (1) collecting student information, building opportunities, and (2) exploring careers. The process emphasizes collaboration among the student, family members, school staff, and agency representatives to capture foundational elements of the student's identity as a future employee and unique individual.

Program outcomes

- Increase expectation of students' capacity to work and pursue employment options.
- Discover individual student's strengths, interests, contributions, conditions for success, and challenges.
- Build collaborative partnerships with families, agencies, and schools.
- Support students in practicing self-advocacy skills and self-determination skills across available environments.
- Assist students in identifying postsecondary goals and career pathway skills.
- Provide a foundation for developing a coordinated set of transition activities.

Benefits of Discovering ME!

Sometimes in the disability field, emphasis is placed on an individual's disability. Rather than building a plan for future employment based on the student's disabilities or what they cannot do, it is crucial to focus on their abilities and the things they do well. Discovering ME! provides teams with a way of focusing on the student's strengths and interests in a way that is both positive and empowering. These benefits were identified through an evaluation of all Discovering ME! implementation sites across Virginia (VCU, 2020). The feedback from educators involved in implementing the process illustrates Discovering ME! encouraged all team members to think more creatively about the future of students with significant disabilities. When this process was implemented with court-involved youth, the feedback indicated the same benefits. One additional benefit was that the youth involved demonstrated positive behavior choices. The process served as a catalyst to help administrators, teachers, students, and their families to think about a positive and fulfilling future for students. And finally, the focus on the students and their interests builds short- and long-term benefits.

Additional benefits include:

- Providing a meeting structure and schedule designed to fit within a reasonable time frame.
- Requiring no purchases of products in order to implement the process.
- Giving families, teachers, and students a voice and a way to have conversations early about transition.
- Providing parents and students a more positive view of what their future will look like while increasing expectations.
- Inviting families, agencies, and schools into a true collaborative partnership.
- Offering user-friendly forms and a structure that helps to prepare a coordinated IEP.

References

Callahan, M. (2016). *A technology evolves: The story of MG&A: What happened when "Try Another Way" met the real world.* Mark Gold & Associates. Retrieved from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57fa78cd6a496306c83a2ca7/t/5cdedd800d89c400011ad1af/1558109568620/What+Happens+when+Try+Another+Way+5-2019.pdf

Virginia Commonwealth University (2020). *Discovering ME! implementation summary results.* Center on Transition Innovations, VCU, Richmond, VA.

Timeline

The following timeline provides an overview of the suggested sequence of events to assist with implementing the Discovering ME! process. While there can be some flexibility in the progression of this process, it is extremely important to follow the suggested timeline for each of the three student meetings during the program implementation phase.

1 Program Development

Three to six months prior to implementation

- Determine need for Discovering ME! CIY
- Secure administrative support

One to three months prior to implementation

- Review Implementation Guide
- Select student(s)
- Select student support team
- Invite team members
- Assign responsibilities for meetings

2 Program Implementation: Year One

Meeting One

- Collect student information through team interviews
- Assess 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills
- Build opportunities

Meeting Two

- Select top three career clusters of interest
- Determine individual assets and challenges to each choice of career clusters
- Build additional opportunities related to career cluster choices

3 Program Evaluation: Ongoing

- Conduct student evaluation
- Conduct process evaluation

Program Development

Planning and preparation is key to successfully implementing the Discovering ME! CIY process. This includes determining the need for the process, securing administrative support, identifying location(s) for implementation, providing professional development, selecting participants, and assigning responsibilities. While each phase of program development is important, some flexibility within the process may be required to meet the individual needs of the students, families, school districts, and other stakeholders involved in the process.

1. Determine need

The first step to Discovering ME! CIY implementation is to determine if a need exists to provide students with a person-centered process of transition assessment and planning.

A review of both your school's data and individual student data will assist in making this determination.

Review:

- Post-school outcomes of students with disabilities, including data from Indicator 14
- Enrollment and completer status of students with IEPs in CTE courses
- Participation of students with disabilities in available activities
- IEPs reflecting a need for appropriate transition assessments and coordinated IEP activities

If the review of data indicates a need to provide some individual students with non-traditional assessment and planning, then presenting the Discovering ME! CIY process to administrators is recommended.

2. Secure administrative support

Whether you are in a small, medium, or large school district, administrative support is critical when considering the implementation of a new process or program. When discussing the need and benefits of Discovering ME! with decision-makers, it is recommended that you share information gleaned from your district, individual student data, and a review of effective practices and predictors for post-school success. Data should dictate need. Evidence-based practices and predictors should dictate the process.

To assist in securing administrative support, share the What is Discovering ME! CIY overview. This quick and efficient document provides administrators with the key details to better understand this process.

3. Select student(s)

All students could potentially benefit from a person-centered approach to transition and career development, so how are candidates prioritized for selection?

The following guidelines are suggestions for selecting students with the greatest potential to benefit from the Discovering ME! CIY process.

Selection guidelines:

- Students who would likely need customized or supported employment in the future
- Students who have the greatest barriers to employment including students at risk for dropping out, with mental health challenges, cultural differences, I/DD, emotional disabilities, or military dependents
- Students who are in middle school or high school
- Students who have family members who are able and willing to go through a two-meeting process and willing to be collaborative partners

4. Select student support team

Each student is supported by a team of individuals representing the home, school, and community. The two requirements for meeting participation are that prospective team members know the student and want to support the student's career awareness and readiness. When all stakeholders are willing to be creative and supportive, they are able to contribute to a future of employment and community integration for the student.

The configuration of teams can be as unique as the student, but it is mandatory that Discovering ME! teams include the student, family members, school representatives, and community agency partners as often as possible. Often, teams will consist of five to eight individuals.

Because teams will function collaboratively during the process, all partners are encouraged to recommend other team members with strong relationships to the student who can provide information and work to advance the opportunities identified through Discovering ME! CIY.

Other team members to consider:

School

- Auxiliary services (behavior specialists, OT, PT, speech)
- Transition specialists
- Instructional assistants

Community

- Adult/employment agencies (VR, waiver services)
- Church/civic/recreational organizations
- Community resource groups

5. Invite team members

After selecting the student to participate in Discovering ME! CIY, the case manager will contact the family and other team members through a phone call, letter, email, or verbal invitation.

The invitation should include:

- **Brief rationale:** plan for the student's future employment and community participation.
- **Process description:** a team invested in the student's future will meet two times for approximately two hours each meeting.
- **Expected outcomes:** possible careers will be identified and the student will have opportunities to explore employment opportunities in available environments.

Subsequent meeting dates can be determined at the initial meeting when all members are present.

TIP: Before concluding the notice of selection, it is imperative that schools secure parental consent before the teacher invites any outside representatives from adult agencies or community organizations that provide support to the student.

6. Assign responsibilities for meetings

During the Discovering ME! CIY process, it is helpful to identify and share responsibilities. The meetings are straightforward, but they do require specific responsibilities in order to run smoothly. The following tasks assist with the success of each meeting and should be assigned to team members.

Inviter

- Invites and prepares team members: student, family, and community partners.
- Secures meeting location.
- Secures consent and release forms. Before sharing any student information with community partners or other non-school personnel, consent and release forms must be signed by the parent. You will want to follow the school's policy and procedures concerning this topic.
- Completes the Student Profile/General Information form.

Notetaker

- Takes notes during the interview and subsequent meetings.
- Completes all other appropriate forms for each meeting.
- Shares edited documents with the team.

Facilitator

- Facilitates the meetings - this should be someone who understands the Discovering ME! CIY process. This person needs to focus on running the meeting and not be involved in contributing input.
- Ensures all materials and forms are completed and ready for next meeting.

Program Implementation

Discovering ME! CIY includes two meetings during the year of the student's participation. The purpose of these meetings is to plan for the student's future employment and community participation. Through this process, the team collects information about the student to build activities that will expand work-based learning opportunities and explore potential careers.

Important considerations for all meetings

Listed below are general considerations intended to assist you in building a collaborative atmosphere throughout the Discovering ME! CIY process. Specific considerations for individual meetings are included in each meeting section.

- The student, family, and school representatives must be present for all Discovery ME! meetings. If one of those individuals is not able to attend, the meeting needs to be rescheduled.
- If a multidisciplinary team already convenes regularly, that may be the best time to schedule the Discovering ME! CIY meetings.
- The atmosphere of the meeting should be one where everyone feels comfortable. It is considered a place where no judgments are made.
- The meetings are intended to engage, value, and meet the needs of each student.

Strategies to meet the needs of students

- Students can be very schedule oriented and need advance preparation to participate in an activity that is atypical to their daily schedule. Add Discovering ME! CIY to their visual or written daily schedule in order to help them anticipate this change.
- Allow the student to be seated next to the person of their choice.
- Allow the student to engage in activities that help them calm or focus. These can include walking around the room, drawing on the whiteboard, or journaling.
- Ensure the student has a variety of ways to respond (verbal, written, thumbs up/thumbs down, and augmentative communication devices).
- Allow students to pace, stretch, or move during the meeting. Provide snacks, water, and give the student breaks when needed.

TIP: If you plan to implement Discovering ME! CIY with more than one student, download the forms to either your computer or Google Drive. Having the reusable documents in one handy folder on your computer will ease the process.

Meeting One

The focus of Meeting One is to discover and collect information about the student's strengths and contributions, interests, conditions for success, and challenges within the school and community environments. Through a facilitated discussion, the facilitator interviews the team and is responsible for the coordination of all activities.

Important considerations for Meeting One

In addition to the general considerations shared previously, teams should also consider the following:

- Create a meeting climate that best meets the needs of the individual student.
- Prior to the meeting, review the section "How Students Can Participate". This will assist in increasing student participation during the meeting.

Forms to be completed before Meeting One

- [ ] **Your division's consent to exchange information form**

Before sharing any student information with community partners or other non-school personnel, consent and release forms must be signed by the parent. You will want to follow the school's policy and procedures concerning this topic and use the forms and documents provided by your school. The Inviter is often the person responsible for ensuring these forms are signed.

- [ ] **Student Profile/General Information**

The Student Profile/General Information form provides very basic demographic information for the team. Information includes the student's age, grade level, and current agency participation. The student's teacher or case manager is often the person responsible for ensuring this form is completed and sharing it with team members. The information is maintained and used according to need. For example, it is often important to note when a student is in eighth grade and transitioning to high school. The student's age can be important when building work-based learning experiences.

Meeting One at a glance

Before Meeting One

- Collect signed consent to exchange information form
- Compile Student Profile/General Information form
- Determine key players
- Identify and reserve meeting space
- Set up date, time, and location for meeting and invite team
- Copy handouts
- Prepare student and family for meeting

During Meeting One

- Introduce team
- Review agenda
- Introduce Discovering ME! CIY
- Conduct facilitated discussion
- Plan for next steps

After Meeting One

- Review all notes
- Complete Foundation Information form

Meeting One Agenda

Focus: Collecting information

Approximate time: 2 hours

Agenda items

1. Welcome and introduction of team members
2. Review agenda
3. Introduce Discovering ME! CIY
   - Introducing Parents to Discovering ME!
4. Conduct facilitated discussion
   - Interviewing Those Who Know Me CIY
5. Plan for next steps
   - Meeting One Next Steps

How Students Can Participate - Meeting One

- Introduce the participants and/or make them nametags before the meeting.
- Assist with tasks such as handing out papers or directing others to the restrooms.
- Provide input by responding to questions such as "Michael, tell us about your daily schedule."
- Validate information by responding to questions such as "Michael, do you agree with what your Mom just said?"

1. Welcome and introduce team members

Each meeting should begin with a welcome from the facilitator. Ideally, the student should introduce the team members. Introductions can contribute to rapport, comfort, and collaboration among team members and serve as an affirmation of everyone's interest and investment in the student's current and future successes. The team at a minimum must include the student, parent, facilitator, and notetaker.

2. Review agenda

The facilitator reviews the focus of the meeting, which is to have a facilitated discussion to learn more about the student. Next, review agenda items.

3. Conduct facilitated discussion

The bulk of Meeting One is devoted to a facilitated discussion using an interview format. This type of meeting format invites participants to share stories, examples, and perceptions in a safe and supportive environment. These discussions are intended to uncover detailed information from various perspectives about the student's strengths and contributions, interests, conditions for success, and challenges. The information gathered helps the team get to know the student before developing exploration activities for employment. Before engaging in the interview, the facilitator should review the suggestions listed below to assist in fostering collaborative conversations.

Suggestions to foster collaborative conversations:

Be respectful to all

Make sure you are using body and expressive language that shows you respect each team member's unique cultural, demographic, and knowledge differences.

Create a "safe zone" environment

Stress that team members adopt a no-judgment attitude with each other.

Help team members build relationships with other team members

This includes making sure all team members participate and no one person dominates the conversation.

Encourage "out of the box" thinking

Try to ensure creative thinking when building opportunities. Remember, we want to customize work-based learning environments to meet the needs of students rather than fit students into existing programs.

Listen more/talk less

Your job is to facilitate the conversations, not to add to them.

Keep meeting agenda on task

Make sure conversations don't sway too much off topic. When needed, bring the group back to focus.

Ask probing questions when needed

If the team is not providing adequate responses, ask probing questions that can provide richer knowledge and understanding of the child's Foundation Information, which includes strengths and contributions, interests, conditions for success, and challenges. Probing questions are sometimes also needed to ensure all team members understand what is being asked.

Have a notetaker!

As great as you may be at multitasking, it's not possible to be both an effective facilitator and notetaker. Make sure another team member is responsible for the task of capturing the discussions and conversations of the team.

Avoid using jargon or terms everyone on the team might not understand

If jargon is used, make sure to explain it to the group and then ask the team to avoid additional use.

Be supportive of all team members and remember that change is hard

Don't be disappointed if some team members take a little longer than others to adapt to this new process.

Interviewing Those Who Know Me CIY form

Interviewing Those Who Know Me CIY is the form used by the facilitator. While the facilitator is asking questions, the notetaker should take notes directly on this form either by hand or on the computer.

The form is divided into four main sections:

1. Discovering Me
2. Discovering My School Experiences
3. Discovering My Community Experiences & Friends
4. Additional Conditions for My Employment

Each main section contains sample prompts and clarifying questions in order to gather information to establish the foundation of the student's strengths, skills, interests, and support needs. The initial prompts are broad statements intended to begin discussions of the student's routines, supports, responsibilities, interests, and past successes and failures. These initial prompts often must be followed up with clarifying questions, which provide the team with additional, more specific information. For example, clarifying questions may be used if team participants did not understand the question or in response to an answer provided.

Sample interview prompt:

"What are some of the typical routines you have: (a) in the morning to get ready for school, (b) after school, (c) in the residential area, (d) on the weekends?"

Clarifying questions:

"What level of prompting does the student typically require when waking up, getting dressed, eating meals, going to school?"

The ability to customize pre-employment opportunities in the available environments comes from knowing the student. When the interview functions as intended, it yields detailed information about the student in four major categories which comprise the Foundation Information:

Strengths/Contributions: personal characteristics or traits, talents, skills, and ways in which the student helps others

Interests: what the student enjoys doing; what they want to learn more about

Conditions for Success: under what conditions is the student most successful and likely to thrive; what conditions will present unfavorable behaviors or outcomes

Challenges: academic, social, behavioral, or sensory nuances that will present obstacles to participate in opportunities or employment

Facilitators are entrusted with the responsibility of making sure that all participants are valued and heard within this process. Additionally, they are responsible for making sure adequate information is obtained through the facilitated discussion process.

In the first section of the Interviewing Those Who Know Me CIY form, the facilitator begins the discussion by asking the student questions pertaining to the topic. When asking the student questions, it's important to tailor the questions to meet the student's comprehension level. The facilitator then asks the family to provide clarification or additional information pertaining to the specific area. In addition, if other team members have more information to share on the topic, it is important to allow them to provide input. Remember, the goal is to get information about the topic across environments.

4. Plan for next steps

Discuss whether there is a need to obtain additional information (see Meeting One Next Steps).

Select activities needed to continue the collection of information:

☐ **Review previous assessments and IEP services**

If appropriate, have one team member volunteer to review formal and informal transition assessments and report back to the team.

☐ **Interview others**

Ask team members if there are others not present at the meeting who know the student well who could be interviewed at a different time.

☐ **Conduct observations**

Observations should be conducted across environments to assess the student's current work environments and opportunities.

☐ **Expand invitations**

Ask team members to suggest others who are not present at the meeting who can contribute to the work of the team.

☐ **Consider any additional steps**

Ask if there are any other specific activities needed by the team for this student.

Facilitator concludes Meeting One by:

- Thanking the team for their participation
- Reminding the team of the date and time of Meeting Two
- Briefly reviewing Meeting Two agenda items

After Meeting One

After the meeting has concluded, the notetaker will share the Next Steps completed form with the team. The facilitator then reviews all notes, including team and additional interviews, observations, pertinent previously collected data, and the Next Steps form. This information is compiled into the Foundation Information, which is divided into four sections. The top half of the four-square format includes the student's strengths, contributions, and interests. This information becomes the building blocks upon which the team builds opportunities for the individual. The bottom half of the four-square includes the student's conditions for success and challenges, which helps the team to build support for the opportunities developed.

Meeting **Two**

In the first meeting, the team began collecting information about the student as a unique individual. At the beginning of the second meeting, the team continues that collection of information through a review of additional sources of data and through an informal team assessment of the student's workplace readiness skills. The team then uses that information to build new opportunities for the student. The facilitator's role is to coordinate the activities of the meeting and guide the team's discussion.

Important considerations for Meeting Two

- Collect information about the student across a variety of environments.
- The atmosphere of the meeting should be one where everyone is willing to focus on what the student can do, not what they cannot do. This is sometimes contrary to the focus of many other meetings for students with special needs.
- Remember we are not here to do the "same old, same old". All team members must be willing to expand their idea of what is possible.
- Recognize that change is hard. We sometimes need to push ourselves and our students outside of our perceived "comfort zones".
- Opportunities must be created in all available environments.
- Talk is cheap. Make sure you **implement the opportunities** created in the meeting.

Forms to be completed before Meeting Two

- [ ] **Foundation Information**

  This form is completed by the facilitator with the help of other team members between the first and second meetings. Review the responses and notes from the interviews to create a summary of this information in a user-friendly format.

- [ ] **Student Observation**

  If deemed appropriate, observations are conducted between meetings. These observations are completed to capture information in various environments in which the student operates. Observations are conducted to provide information regarding what the student does, while avoiding observation bias or assumptions.

- [ ] **Additional Interviews**

  If deemed appropriate, additional interviews are conducted by an assigned team member between meetings. These interviews are designed to capture the input of others who know the student well but are unable to be in attendance at the meeting.

Meeting Two at a glance

Before Meeting Two

- Identify and reserve meeting space
- Set up date, time, and location for meeting and invite team
- Copy handouts
- Prepare student and family for meeting
- Complete Foundation Information form
- Complete Observation form (if needed)
- Conduct Additional Interview form (if needed)

During Meeting Two

- Introduce team and review agenda
- Review new information
- Review and update Foundation Information
- Assess workplace readiness skills
- Build work-based opportunities
- Plan for next steps

After Meeting Two

- Review all notes
- Provide Building Opportunities form to all team members
- Update Foundation Information form with new information
- Add Workplace Readiness Skills results to Foundation Information

Meeting Two Agenda

Focus: Building opportunities

Approximate time: 1.5 to 2 hours

Agenda items

1. Welcome and team introductions
2. Review agenda
3. Review new information
4. Review and update Foundation Information
5. Assess workplace readiness skills
   - Transition and Court-Involved Youth Workplace Readiness Skills
6. Build work-based opportunities
   - Building Opportunities CIY
7. Plan for next steps
   - Meeting Two Next Steps

How Students Can Participate - Meeting Two

- Review student Foundation Information by presenting to the team.
- Provide input on Transition and Court-Involved Youth Workplace Readiness Skills evaluation.
- Prepare or share snacks.

1. Welcome and introduce team

The success of the Discovering ME! CIY process is based on the ability of the student's team to work collaboratively. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to build on the team's collaborative spirit by recognizing and welcoming all team members to the second meeting. A friendly way of doing this is to allow everyone in the room to introduce themselves and explain their connection to the student.

2. Review agenda

The facilitator will briefly review what was accomplished in the previous meeting. The facilitator will then review the focus of Meeting Two, which is to have a facilitated discussion to build opportunities across environments. Next, review agenda items.

3. Review new information

The team interview or team conversation was simply the beginning of the data collection process. As with any good transition assessment and planning format, data collection is an ongoing and continuous process. At the end of the first meeting, the team determined the sources of additional information needed and assigned team members responsibility.

These sources included:

- Informal or formal assessments that had been previously conducted that would help the team understand who this student is and how his life experiences can be used to encourage career development. It is important to recognize the limits of some of these forms of data. For example, if the student was given a standardized assessment which required a reading level above their level, it is highly unlikely the results of that data are accurate. It is always important to validate results through unbiased observations and/or multiple sourcing.
- Additional interviews of others who know the student well but were not at the first team meeting.
- Observations of the student in various environments.

After team members report on additional information, a summary of the critical and reliable data should be included in the appropriate category of the student's Foundation Information. Updating and adding new data should always be a part of Discovering ME! CIY teams. The student's Foundation Information should be an ever-evolving document.

4. Review and update Foundation Information

As a team, review the student's Foundation Information for accuracy.

Types of corrections or updates needed:

New data from new experiences

As the student experiences new opportunities, we need to include data from those experiences.

Changes associated with maturity

It is typical for students to change their likes, dislikes, interests, and preferences. As adults, we experience these same changes. As a team supporting the student, it is important for us to recognize and honor these changes.

Existing data may need to be verified or clarified

For example, the team may have noted that the student likes working with animals. The team may need to build an opportunity which will help to clarify that piece of information. Does the student only like certain animals? Does she have any interest in working with animals as a career? Does she want to have her own pets to create ways to interact with others in her community? Did she report she likes animals only to make her Mom happy? Did she like animals yesterday, but today she has changed her mind?

5. Assess Workplace Readiness Skills

Workplace readiness skills are the skills generally believed to be most needed for successful employment. They are skills you would need regardless if you are working as a cashier at a fast food restaurant, as a manager at that same restaurant, or the chief operating officer of that restaurant chain. Skills related to work ethics, teamwork, problem solving, and self-representation are just a few of these essential workplace readiness skills. There are three major reasons we include this informal assessment as a part of this process:

1. It is important to be aware of these skills in order to build them in students. A lack of these skills can pose just as significant a barrier to entering or maintaining employment as a lack of job-specific skills. Therefore, they need to be a focus of early career conversations and instruction.

2. These same skills are important to community integration and healthy family relationships. Reinforcing skills across multiple environments by multiple people will develop skill acquisition and encourage generalization of skills.

3. Baseline data from this informal evaluation can help guide instruction and determine if progress is being made in building these skills.

Workplace Readiness Skills Evaluation

Transition and Court-Involved Youth Workplace Readiness Skills is an informal assessment used to gauge early job assets and needs conducted through the team process.

Steps to complete assessment:

1. Provide the rationale for this assessment. Explain the importance of these skills and the reasons the process includes this informal evaluation (see pg. 25).
2. Explain the rationale of a team approach to evaluation. A team approach will be used because students can demonstrate a variety of competency levels in skills areas across environments.
3. The facilitator will read each individual description ("what it may look like") within each skill area. Through a consensus of the team, the descriptor will be marked as a "**+**" if this is a "**job asset**" or "**-**" if this is a "**job need**" for the student.
4. Record the consensus answer and note any relevant conversations related to the specific skill area.
5. Summarize the data. After this meeting, record the summarized data on the back of the student's Foundation Information page. In order to summarize:
   - Simply look at the number of "**+**" and the number of "**-**" in each skill area.
   - If you have more "**+**" mark it as a "**job asset**"; if you have more "**-**" mark as a "**job need**".
   - If there is an even number of both "**+**" and "**-**", the reviewers should evaluate the comments and determine which category fits best.

TIP: Please note, you will repeat this informal assessment annually to identify areas of progress or regression.

6. Build work-based opportunities

Now we come to the crux of this meeting, which involves building opportunities for students across environments. These opportunities should be based on their strengths, the contributions they make, and their interests, while honoring their conditions for success and challenges.

TIP: Too often there is a great deal of emphasis placed on what others do for the student with a disability. We need to change the narrative. Our focus needs to be on what the student can do for others. How can they add to the functioning of their environments? This focus on what they can contribute changes the narrative to the student being viewed as competent. Competence leads to employment.

Why do we build opportunities?

These opportunities can provide:

- authentic environments for the student to learn and practice job and workplace readiness skills
- situational assessments which help the student to better define their short and long-term career goals
- ways for the student to contribute to others and be seen as competent
- validation of likes, dislikes, interests, and conditions for success
- opportunities to become more independent, self-reliant, and develop their self-determination skills
- the building of coordinated opportunities based on a strength-based model

How do we build opportunities?

1. Review ways students can benefit from these opportunities (see section above).
2. Build opportunities across environments. This will allow collaborative sharing of responsibilities and help to reach the ultimate goal of future community integration and competitive employment.
3. Begin brainstorming possible opportunities while focusing on the student's strengths, ways they currently contribute to others, and their interests (top half of the Foundation Information). It is important to remind team members there are "no restrictions and no judgments" when brainstorming. Team members should be encouraged to share their thoughts of possible opportunities without the limitations (at this time) of their perceived level of "realism". Allowing for this free flow of ideas will generate a greater number of varied ideas.

   Examples of leading questions the facilitator may use include:

   - "Where, within our setting, is there a need for Derek's strengths in organizing?"
   - "Are there available environments where Nicholas can gain work experience related to customer service?"
   - "Within the school environment, what can Presley do to learn more about animals?"

TIP: Building opportunities may be challenging. Do not overlook the benefit of individualizing transition services and instruction based on the student's preferences and interests.

6. Build work-based opportunities (continued)

4. Choose at least one opportunity to be completed. This can be completed by the team through the following process:

   A. Identify first opportunity. Identify the first specific opportunity to be explored ("Which brainstormed opportunity would we like to explore first?").

   B. Determine appropriateness. Determine if this opportunity meets the student's strengths, interests, and ways they contribute to others while still honoring their conditions for success and challenges. ("Are there any challenges that would prevent this student from participating in this opportunity? Or are there any supports that we need to build in this opportunity to ensure the student is successful?"). If the opportunity does honor the challenges and supports can be provided, the team continues with building the experience. If there are challenges that cannot be overcome or supports and accommodations that cannot be added to allow for an appropriate experience, the team needs to explore other opportunities.

   Example 1: Jack has a physical disability with his foot that does not allow him to walk long distances. The team must decide if there are any supports or accommodations that can be used to allow him to participate. Accommodations such as riding a bike rather than walking were deemed unsafe or inappropriate. Therefore, the team moved to another opportunity, such as being a volunteer reader to pets within the local animal shelter.

   Example 2: Within the home, Morty has a passion for making sure that all of the family's electronic devices never fall below half charged. Accordingly, the team identified an opportunity for Morty to work with the school's librarian to charge the school's tablets. While this opportunity builds on one of his strengths and ways he contributes to others, the team thought the library environment would be too overwhelming for him due to his social anxiety. The team determined a small private room within the library could accommodate this challenge.

   C. Make final selections. Make final selections of at least one opportunity. Additionally, identify who will provide the supports, who will make sure the opportunity occurs, and the timeline for the opportunity to begin. Record this information on the Building Opportunities CIY form.

   D. Share information. Share information with team members regarding teaching new skills, using a task analysis, and providing prompts to assist in making these opportunities customized work-based learning experiences.

   E. Identify data collection methods. Determine how data about the opportunity will be gathered.

7. Plan for next steps

The team will need to decide which of the following activities are appropriate to continue the information collection process for the individual student (see Meeting Two Next Steps).

Select activities needed to continue the collection of information:

☐ **Review previous assessments and IEP services**

If appropriate, have one team member volunteer to review formal and informal transition assessments and report back to the team.

☐ **Interview others**

Ask team members if there are others not present at the meeting who know the student well who could be interviewed at a different time.

☐ **Consider any additional steps**

Ask if there are any other specific activities needed by the team for this student.

☐ **Conduct observations**

Observations should be conducted across environments to assess the student's current work environments and opportunities.

☐ **Expand invitations**

Ask team members to suggest others who are not present at the meeting who can contribute to the work of the team.

Facilitator concludes Meeting Two by:

- Thanking the team for their participation

After Meeting Two

After the meeting has concluded, the notetaker and facilitator will ensure all team members have copies of the Building Opportunities form for reference and review. Additionally, these team members will make sure the student's Foundation Information form is updated with new information such as the Transition and Court-Involved Youth Workplace Readiness Skills assessment.

By utilizing the Discovering ME! for Court-Involved Youth process, teams gain valuable information to plan opportunities and services with youth served in restrictive settings. At the conclusion of this process, the information should be incorporated into the student's IEP, shared as appropriate with individuals who serve the youth, and be considered as the youth transitions from the restrictive setting to their home, school, and community.

Center on transition innovations VCU

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