Recently, the initial cohort of participants completed the Post-Secondary Apprenticeship for Youth with disabilities program in New Orleans. The program is designed to assist youth with disabilities (18-21) in transitioning from the high school environment into the community. The program curriculum includes self-advocacy, independent living, social skills instruction, and job/work-readiness training. It is a collaborative effort between state vocational rehabilitation agencies (VR), community colleges and universities and disability advocacy/service agencies. Case studies were done on two individuals who completed the program to help describe the outcomes and lessons learned from this cohort.

Key Findings:

- High school teachers of the participants questioned many aspects of the program, but by the end of the program, stopped questioning practices.
- Program participants who consistently attended class and completed assignments earned above average grades.
- Significant discussions and collaborations with families was needed for success.
- Disabilities were not obstacles as much as poverty, homelessness, and family issues were, as well as poor diets and lack of adequate sleep.
- Seven out of eight program completers were employed in natural community settings by the end of the program.

Putting It into Practice:

Transition programs for youth with disabilities should offer a variety of services that will help these individuals gain the skills necessary to integrate into the community. Some of the recommendations for employers, VR practitioners, and VR agencies include:

- Programs should include components such as:
  - Career awareness and community experience.
  - High school diploma attainment and work-based training/certifications.
  - Interagency collaboration and parent/family involvement.
  - Training the individual in self-advocacy, self-determination, and self-care.

- Employment components of these programs should include:
  - Wages at or above minimum wage.
  - Support in identifying career interests.
  - Job searching assistance, resume development, and assistance with applications.
  - Interviewing preparation and practice.

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