



# VR Research in Brief

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## *Centers for Youth with Disabilities, Parents, and Professionals Working in Transition and Employment Planning* Prepared by the PACER Center for the TA Network

*Thirty years ago, to ensure that children with disabilities would have the right to a free and appropriate public education, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004). Parent involvement has been an essential principle of this legislation from the beginning. As recent years have focused attention on the critical period when youths with disabilities transition from the public education system to adult services and the adult world, the need to provide families with information and training that will help them successfully launch their youths into adulthood has also come to the fore.*

### Rehabilitation Services Administration Parent Training

Congress first authorized funding for Parent Information and Training Projects in the 1992 amendments to the *Rehabilitation Act* under Title III, Section 303. This was done in recognition of the need to provide youths with disabilities and their families with information and training focusing on career development, employment, higher education, and adult service systems. These programs are directed to provide training and information to enable youths with disabilities, and their parents, family members, guardians, advocates, or other authorized representatives, to participate more effectively with professionals in meeting vocational, independent living, and rehabilitation needs.

Since they were first authorized, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has funded Parent Information and Training Projects in 25 states. RSA currently funds seven projects serving 10 states: California, Florida, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Washington, along with the Technical Assistance on Transition and

the Rehabilitation Act Project (TATRA), a related technical assistance project providing coordinated and individualized activities for RSA-funded Parent Information and Training Projects. Grants have been from three to five years in length.

Although budget constraints have limited the number of such programs, RSA-funded Parent Information and Training Projects have documented how their projects have made a difference in the lives of many people with disabilities and their families, helping those they serve to:

- better understand vocational rehabilitation (VR) and independent living programs and services
- communicate more effectively with transition and rehabilitation personnel and other relevant professionals
- develop an individualized plan for employment
- understand relevant sections of the *Rehabilitation Act*

## RSA-funded Parent Training: Program Outcome Data

TATRA has published data pertaining to grant activities collected by currently funded projects and conducted over a 12-month period in 2005 and 2006. The data represents the number of people served and the positive outcomes these activities had for families.

Approximately 350 parents in nine states were interviewed by telephone to gather the data for this report. Parents who provided this information had attended workshops sponsored by their state RSA Parent Information and Training Project or received individual information and referral or advocacy services during the 2005–06 grant year. Interviewers were either individuals paid specifically to conduct telephone interviews, volunteers, or staff who did not originally provide the individual assistance or training. Parents were selected on a random basis.

In the 2005–06 grant year parents looked to the RSA Parent Information and Training Projects for information on preparing youths for employment (56 percent), postsecondary education (42 percent), and independent living (53 percent). As is attested by the following data, these projects demonstrate significant outcomes.

- 96 percent of parents attending workshops said that the information they received was useful. Programs provided information that helped youths and their parents make informed choices, work effectively with professionals, access services, promote youths' self-determination, and educate other families.
- 88 percent said they received appropriate services as a result of the information they received.
- 84 percent were more confident in working with VR professionals.
- 83 percent of parents said that they were more confident working with schools because of the individual assistance they received.
- **88 percent believe they would not have received services without this assistance.**

## Who benefits from the training provided at the RSA centers?

- 15,274 youths, family members, advocates, and professionals attended trainings, presentations, and information fairs sponsored by RSA-funded parent training programs in the 2005–06 grant year. Nineteen percent of those individuals were from culturally and racially diverse backgrounds.
- 16,600 youths, family members, advocates, and professionals received direct assistance from the staff of RSA-funded parent training programs via telephone calls, in-person meetings, online correspondence, or other forms of individualized assistance during this time period. Ten percent of those were from culturally and racially diverse backgrounds.
- 326,684 homes and offices received information through newsletters, radio, and mailings; 82,898 people visited project websites.
- Youths or young adults with disabilities constituted about one-third (31 percent) of participants directly served by programs. Parents or family members were slightly more than one-third (35 percent) and professionals who work with youths with disabilities and families constituted a final third (34 percent).
- RSA Parent Information and Training Projects served youths in middle school, high school, and beyond. Slightly more than one-fourth (27 percent) were under age 14, about half (48 percent) were high school age, and one-fourth (25 percent) were over the age of 18.

More information on the RSA Parent Information and Training Projects can be found at <http://www.pacer.org/tatra/rsa.asp>.

Source: *Helping Families Transition to the Future; Rehabilitation Service Administration Parent Information and Training Projects; Outcome Data 2005–2006.* <http://www.pacer.org/tatra/resources/RSA/page1.asp>.

## Office of Special Education Programs Parent Centers

For many years, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) as authorized by *IDEA*, has funded Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) in every state. There are currently over 100 PTIs in the United States; each state has at least one, and states with large populations may have more. Each state VR agency is required by the *Rehabilitation Act* to have a representative from an OSEP-funded PTI in their state serving on their State Rehabilitation Councils.

While families of transition-age youths naturally turn to these centers as their youths transition to adulthood, OSEP-funded PTI activities are focused on the special education issues of their authorizing legislation, *IDEA*. PTIs primarily help families of children with disabilities access early childhood services and a free and appropriate public education through the high school years. Although the OSEP-funded PTIs in every state provide families with training on the transition planning process of *IDEA*, not all have the capacity to provide more comprehensive parent training on young adult issues such as VR and postsecondary education. Only a few of these centers currently receive funding from RSA to provide parent training on VR and other adult service systems.

Many PTIs have hired native Spanish, Hmong, Somali, and other non-English language speakers to work more effectively with families from diverse cultures and potentially assist state VR agencies to improve outreach to and services for minority populations. Culturally and racially diverse families represented 27 percent of the contacts made by PTIs at presentations and trainings and through calls and letters in 2007–08.

Many OSEP parent centers have collaborated with state VR agencies to develop materials for families of youths with disabilities transitioning to adult services and want to expand their capacity to provide families with information on transition, VR, career development, and employment issues. In a national survey of OSEP-funded PTIs conducted by the TATRA Project in 2009 to identify their technical assistance needs, the following transition issues were identified as being of greatest relevance to the families served by their centers:

- Strategies to help parents promote the self-determination of youths
- Internship and work experience opportunities for students with disabilities
- Promising practices that prepare youths with disabilities for employment
- Supported or customized employment for youths with significant disabilities
- Information and training materials that could be used with youths, not just their parents, on the *Americans with Disabilities Act* [and self advocacy concerns and other issues].
- Family-friendly information about VR services
- Postsecondary education options
- Examples of transition programs that blend funding from education, workforce, VR, human services, and other systems

More information on the OSEP Parent Training and Information Centers can be found at <http://www.taalliance.org/>.

Source: TATRA Survey of Federally Funded Parent Centers (2001) and 2009 TATRA Survey of Federally Funded Parent Centers currently in press.

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