

## **For DMH Newsletter:**

As of March 1<sup>st</sup>, transition age youth in Southern Windsor County have a new program to turn to for support with their employment, education, health care, and healthy living needs.

Health Care and Rehabilitation Services (HCRS) and the Southern Windsor Youth in Transition (YIT) Steering Committee are proud to announce the start of the Youth in Transition Project. This project comes at a crucial time. The national unemployment rate stands at 9.7%; however, young adults, age 16-21 are experiencing unemployment at a rate of 27.1%. In addition to the scarcity of employment, some young adults have the added difficulty of having emotional or behavioral difficulties, homelessness, difficult family relationships, and substance use issues. A number of these young adults are falling through the cracks and need assistance to prepare them for independence and adulthood.

In an effort to address these challenges, Vermont applied for and received a six-year grant from SAMHSA with the goal of providing transition-age youth with adequate preparation and supports to be productively engaged in the community and free from incarceration.

Stakeholders in Southern Windsor County came together and developed a grant proposal to address the needs of at-risk youth whose educational, emotional, behavioral, health care, and vocational needs are hindering them from progressing effectively into adulthood. HCRS was appointed applicant and fiscal agent for the grant project. Once the regional vision was approved by the Statewide team, HCRS hired Bob Lauro as Project Coordinator to identify underserved youth in Southern Windsor County, connect the youth to existing services, and provide intensive case management whenever necessary. Bob has a unique background which includes youth transition facilitation and social justice campaigning. In 2006 Mr. Lauro designed and implemented a federal grant project aimed at providing transition services for students in Boston Public Schools. Over the two-year grant period, 60 students were served and 35 were placed into competitive employment that lasted more than ninety days.

The Southern Windsor YIT Steering Committee will continue to oversee the project. Mr. Lauro will recruit and form a Youth Advisory Board to provide a “youth voice” to the Steering Committee and to develop local work projects that will provide needed local services and build valuable skills and experiences for participating youth.

Mr. Lauro is excited to be part of this challenging and rewarding endeavor. “It is our hope that through our work we can not only provide needed services, but that we will also create a long lasting collaboration between youth and area stakeholders that will be here for years to come,” says Mr. Lauro.

For more information about the Youth in Transition Project, contact Bob Lauro at 802-886-4567 ext. 2530 or by email at [blauro@hcrs.org](mailto:blauro@hcrs.org).