

**Youth in Transition
Bennington Region
October 2009**

The Vision for Transitioning Bennington Youth:

We envision that all transition age youth and young adults feel connected to their community.

We envision that all youth and young adults will achieve their full potential and have the support necessary to identify and achieve their personal (life) goals.

We envision that young people who experience a serious emotional disturbance will have the necessary support to be productively engaged in the community and free from incarceration.

Attachment A: The Bennington Youth in Transition Regional Plan

Description of Services Already in Place

Bennington acknowledges that prevention is the best form of intervention. Prevention can and should happen at each junction point of a young adult's journey with the intention that there will be more young people who graduate high school, fewer who become incarcerated and more who are linked earlier with the appropriate services.

Bennington County offers a wide array of youth services, ranging from providing minimal assistance to services that are more intensive for those young people who have more serious needs, such as youth who are severely emotionally disturbed (SED).

Mount Anthony Union High, the local high school, is a full service school which includes a student center with mental, physical and dental health services along with wellness programming. In order to bring the services to the students, the Department of Labor, Vocational Rehabilitation and UCS are a daily presence in the school along with other community partners.

The JOBS program is an active member of the community and a partner in providing services to SED youth. The JOBS Program has worked successfully with young people in order to remove barriers to a successful transition into independence. The Bennington JOBS Program is one of the few in the state to have a true partnership with the Department of Corrections. DOC provides some funding to the JOBS program as a way to support the high number of young people who participate in the program.

This summer, the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and ARRA funds were used to create job opportunities for many youth and young adults in the area. Sunrise Family Resource Center and the Tutorial Center employed young people again this summer. A partnership between JOBS and Department of Labor created an additional opportunity to a group of young people and created a work crew under the supervision of JOBS staff. The work crew partnered with Lake Paran and the Nature Conservancy to paint, clear trails, and provide general clean-up. It is planned that these opportunities will continue beyond this summer.

The Center for Restorative Justice (CRJ) is a pre-charge program working with young people throughout the county. CRJ offers a variety of groups and individual services. CRJ is an active member of the community and a member of the planning team for this grant.

These are just a few examples of services offered to young people in the community. The youth service inventory was updated by the youth who participated on the YIT planning team and provides a more detailed list of services.

The youth service inventory allowed the team to take a closer look at the services available, identify gaps, and service to recognize service redundancy. It is in the identification of service redundancy and the realization that services are often disjointed that the planning team feels it can make the most difference in developing a more cohesive system of care for transitioning young adults.

An unmet need identified in the community is that we are unable to make the local system of care a more efficient system due to time restrictions. For instance, one area of overlap identified was that of the skills development groups offered by the various independent living programs, for example, Transitional Living, Youth Development, Teen Housing Options programs and others. Each program offers transitional living skills development groups that are required as part of their programs. It is suggested that the facilitators of the groups work together to identify a common curriculum and divide up the facilitation process in order to make the system more efficient and share limited resources. The YIT funding will allow this type of system work to begin.

Attachment B: Bennington Youth Services Inventory – August 2009

Target Population:

All young people are at risk of facing significant challenges as they transition to adulthood regardless of their risk and protective factor. However, young people who are Severely Emotionally Disturbed (SED) pose a greater risk for involvement with the justice system or dropping out of school than their counterparts. Therefore, the Bennington County Youth in Transition planning team identified youth and young adult's between 16 and 21 years old who are SED, and who are out of school, at significant risk of dropping out of school, and/or those who have had a first incident with the criminal justice system as the primary target group.

Many of the young people identified are not connected to any particular service or person; they are often moving on the fringe. Making a significant connection with this group is essential and will happen at many different entry points. Primary entry points are through the Department of Corrections, Center for Restorative Justice, Mt Anthony High School, the Tutorial Center, and social networks such as the recreation center and The Gamers Grotto (a local privately owned business).

Description of Priority Service Strategy:

Youth Outreach Program

Using the principles of Sequential Intercept Model and the TIPS Model, the Bennington Region will build upon the success of the UCS JOBS and Transitional Living Programs by creating a Youth Outreach Program.

The Youth Outreach Program will consist of one full time Youth Outreach Coordinator and two to three part time Youth Outreach Workers. The program will be housed with the JOBS and Transitional Living Program staff and supervised by the JOBS manager. This is a natural connection and will provide system continuity among services that are being provided.

The two primary focus areas of the Youth Outreach Program are **outreach** to young people and **enhancing the existing system of care**:

Outreach

The program will outreach to young people who are SED, dropped out of school (or at significant risk of dropping out) and are at risk of moving deeper into the criminal justice systems.

The Youth Outreach Program will employ a Youth Outreach Coordinator who will seek out transition age youth and young adults who have been identified by the community as at risk, develop a supportive relationship, build a strength based plan, connect them with services as needed, and connect them with a positive peer group or mentor either through a Youth Outreach Worker or the Youth Advisory Council.

The Youth Advisory Council will be made up of a group of young people who are in the process of transitioning or have transitioned to adulthood who have worked or who are working with Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and/or Criminal Justice systems. The Youth Advisory Council will act as a consultation team to the Outreach Program, create social and recreational opportunities for young people in the community, and work to increase the youth voice within the Bennington County community and local civic organizations. The Youth Advisory Council will work to develop its own system and protocol with guidance from the Youth Outreach Coordinator.

The Youth Outreach Coordinator will work with the Council to identify 2-3 part time Youth Outreach Workers who have worked within the system of care and are in recovery. The Youth Outreach Workers (YOW's) will be hired on a part-time short-term basis and paid a stipend for their work. The goal is to train the YOW's as paid peer mentors, work with young people for up to a year at which time other young people on the council will be identified as YOW's and trained as paid supports. This rotation will continue throughout the grant cycle.

The JOBS Program received some limited funding two years ago to create mentoring options for youth. The program identified individuals who worked with the JOBS program and who were successfully managing their own lives. There were two particular young men who were critical to the success of this undertaking. The two young men were both in recovery, living independently, and working in full time jobs. They mentored young people who, like them at their age, had significant substance abuse issues and were involved in the criminal justice system. The young people who were mentored by these young men became substance free and did not commit further

offenses. The mentoring relationship was essential in the progress the young people made in reaching their goals. The Youth Outreach Program will work to replicate this mentor model and give young people the opportunity to develop a future story.

Duties of the Youth Outreach Workers will include:

- Gaining an opportunity to learn new skills, develop a productive relationship with an at risk youth and use their experiences to support them.
- Supporting identified youth by building a positive peer relationship and work toward identified goals.
- Working to ensure appropriate community supports are identified and in place for the young adult.
- Working with community partners, such as the Substance Abuse Coalition to create positive social activities.
- Being an active member of the Youth Advisory Council.
- Participating in training provided by the Youth Outreach Coordinator.

Enhance the Existing System of Care

The Youth Coordinator will identify and interface with the current youth systems such as School, Family Services, Center for Restorative Justice, Sunrise, Department of Labor, Adult Education, DOC, Police, the Juvenile Justice Team, and other youth serving entities to continue the process of developing a more coordinated system of care.

This coordinated effort will result in the development of the Youth Services Council (YSC). The primary goal and mission of the Youth Services Council is to develop a coordinated system of care for transition age youth and young adults paying particular attention to those who are SED.

The Youth Services Council will work with the Youth in Transition Regional Plan developed by the community to help build on the strengths of the plan and identify ways of filling the service gaps. The Youth Outreach Coordinator or his or her designee and a Youth Outreach Worker will co-facilitate the YSC. The YSC may become an extension of the Local Interagency Team (LIT) as a way to better incorporate various systems.

The Youth Outreach Coordinator will plan and facilitate additional summits on youth during the grant period. The summits will work to identify and deal with larger community issues affecting successful transition to adulthood. The summits will enhance a community system of care and work toward identifying situations that impact youth. The focus will be to develop a collaborative method of addressing the identified issues; particularly those acknowledged in the community plan and enhance the work of the YSC.

The Youth Outreach Coordinator will:

- Develop positive connections with community partners
- Create a Youth Services Council.
- Develop a training program for the Youth Outreach Workers. The training program will include information on community resources, mediation skills, and ethics.

- Provide on-going supervision to the Youth Outreach Workers.
- Work directly with youth and young adults to assure positive connections with services and community.
- Work to develop a mentor program to increase positive peer supports
- Develop a protocol to ensure that there is a strategy to engage new youth workers after a specified period of service.
- Will support the Youth Advisory Council.

Program Components

The goals of the outreach component of the program are twofold: Skill development and the feeling of belonging for both the youth outreach worker and the program participant being its focus. It is anticipated that program participants will develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will allow some of them to successfully move into a Youth Outreach Worker position.

Youth Outreach Workers will stay in their position for up to one year. The graduating Youth Outreach Worker will develop the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to successfully attain their stated personal goals. The “graduating” YOW will mentor the new Youth Outreach Worker during a transition period as they move out of the position and the new worker moves into the position.

The Youth Outreach Workers will:

- Take part in an on-going training program that will develop their personal skills, acquaint them with resource and accepted best practices around boundaries, support, crisis issues, and maintaining their own development.
- Develop a relationship with community partners in order to assure that youth who are not connected to resources are identified and referred to the Youth Outreach Program.
- Take a pre and post inventory to assess the efficacy of the program for the young adults who are acting as peer mentors.
- Work directly with the “at risk” population providing support in linking to services and community.
- Assist program participants in securing health insurance.
- Assist the participant in attaining a medical and dental home and consistent medical care.
- Provide a positive peer group for program participants both individually and in group and social situations.
- Meet with the Youth Outreach Coordinator and other Youth Outreach Workers for regular supervision and support.
- Have a full understanding the job description and what is appropriate for them to do and when they need to ask for help.
- Be a part of the transition period for the next Youth Outreach Worker to assume their place on the team.

Program Participants will:

- Make a commitment to be part of the Youth Outreach Program.

- Actively participate in an assessment to determine their strengths and needs both at the beginning and the end of their program participation. Assessments may include:
 - Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment
 - Asset Assessment
 - YAZI
 - Comparable assessments
- Have Health Insurance and identify a medical home.
- Develop personal goals with the assistance of the Youth Outreach Worker or Youth Outreach Coordinator.
- Meet with the Youth Outreach Worker regularly.
- Seek the assistance of the Youth Outreach Worker when needed.
- Participate in groups and social activities with Youth Outreach Worker and other program participants.
- Develop the skills to advocate for themselves.
- Seek support of the Youth Outreach Coordinator if the participant has any issues that need additional skills or intervention.
- Evaluate their participation in the program.
- Participate in program evaluation.
- Participate in the Youth Advisory Council if appropriate.
- Be attached to services, resources and programs that will allow them to continue to make progress toward their goals.

Grant Oversight

The Local Interagency Team will oversee the Youth in Transition Grant. Active members of the LIT are members of the grant planning team, a sub-committee of the LIT. The multi-disciplinary membership will ensure the success of the program's goals and objectives by monitoring progress, identifying gaps, working on system issues and possibly becoming members of the Youth Services Council.

The experience of the LIT and the grant steering committee will guarantee that the program components are implemented. It is important that all components are assessed as the program begins to unfold and expand. A multi-disciplinary team will be the most competent to interpret the results of evaluation and to provide guidance on the best ways to successfully implement Youth Outreach Programming.

Fiduciary

United Counseling Service will act as the fiduciary for the Youth in Transition grant. United Counseling Service (UCS) Bennington County's Designated Mental Health Agency has a long rich history of being an active partner within the community.

For over 50 years, UCS has collaborated with several departments within Vermont's Agency of Human Services and other key community member agencies. One of the critical ways Vermont has been able to develop successful local systems of care is through innovative and collaborative local partnerships and contracting relationships. UCS has taken the lead in many community planning efforts in building the local system of care and participation in the Youth in Transition grant continues that tradition.

UCS Organizational Structure

United Community Services, Inc. serves as the parent corporation of three subsidiaries—namely, United Counseling Service, Inc., United Children's Services, Inc., and United Community Properties, Inc. It provides long-range planning, community relations, fundraising, and general oversight of the subsidiaries. This board manages our endowment fund that strengthens and supports all our services.

United Counseling Service provides mental health, developmental disability and substance abuse services.

United Children's Services consists of Bennington County Head Start, the UCS Infant and Toddler Center, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Bennington County.

United Community Properties provides property management services to the other corporations.

See Attachment C – UCS Organizational Chart

See Attachment D – Specialized Children's Services (SCS) Organizational Chart

Board of Directors

UCS is governed by a Board of Directors, which consists of a minimum of nine residents of Bennington County. It is the Board's responsibility to assure that the agency provides comprehensive services to all citizens in the service area. Much of the work of the Board is done by its committees.

The board supervises and over-see's the activities of the Executive Director who in turn is in charge of supervising the many divisions and upper management team as they fulfill the mission, vision, and values of UCS.

The Board closely monitors the quality of service that UCS provides, as does the Department of Mental Health (DMH), federal representatives, state auditors, and the Council on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

See Attachment E - Board Organizational Chart

Vision Development and Regional Plan

Process:

Bennington County held four summits on youth during 2006 and 2007. The planning team for these summits included representation from Family Services, Department of

Labor, Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health, School to Workforce Partnership, and the Regional Partnership.

The team identified areas of competency and used them to help target the discussion. The four areas were education, employment, independent living and connections to the community. The areas of education, employment, and independent living were undertaken in individual forums. Connections to the community were woven into the work of all the forums. A primary goal of the forums was to gather information and develop a Bennington County Regional Plan. The summits identified available services, gaps, and services that are necessary for a successful transition.

As the component areas, education, employment, independence, and connections to the community were broken down, there was one theme that continually ran through it. Young people needed a positive relationship to foster their continued success. It was this relationship that allowed young people to feel supported in their decision-making.

The attendees at the summits included representation from juvenile justice, DCF, substance abuse, family advocacy, legislators, United Way, mental health, schools, and youth and families as well as other community partners.

The Youth in Transition Planning committee built upon the work of the summits and was created through a subcommittee of the Local Interagency Team (LIT). The core members of the planning team included 4 youth members, a facilitator, and representation from mental health, CRJ, DCF, the parent child center, and JOBS. Throughout the planning process, additional members of the community participated in the plan, such as: the Community College of Vermont, Bennington Police Department, Department of Corrections, Department of Labor, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Youth Development Program. Outreach to community partners will continue as the team builds the Youth Services Council and the Youth Advisory Council.

The four youth members played a significant role throughout the planning process. It is important to state that the youth members both challenged the group and gave it a perspective it would not otherwise have realized.

Youth Participation

Four young adults participated as members of the grant planning committee; they ranged in age from 16 to 20.

Two of the four young people were members of the planning committee from the beginning stages. They have been active and equal partners on the team.

The youth members developed a survey for distribution at the Bennington “May Fest”, an annual street fair. The survey takers were asked what they liked about Bennington, what they needed, and what they would like to change about Bennington. The survey also asked for contact information if the young people were interested in participating in further discussions about the needs of youth and young adults. The youth members created a banner to attract attention and when the youth didn't come to the workers, the workers went to the youth. Through their diligence, they collected 105 responses to the

survey. Many of the answers focused on wanting a place to be and a person to connect with. The young members contacted all the participants of the survey and invited them to attend their follow-up focus groups.

Two additional youth members joined the planning team in July through the Summer Youth Employment Program at Sunrise, the local Parent Child Center. In the true sense of collaboration, Sunrise developed a work plan for these young people to work as part of the development of the Transition Grant. This opportunity allowed four young people to really take ownership of the project. With guidance from the planning group and their worksite supervisor these young woman took charge.

The youth workers held three focus groups. The young woman developed a list of open-ended questions to facilitate the discussion. They facilitated their first focus group at Sunrise. This gave them the opportunity to practice and hone their facilitation skills with peers they knew and who were dealing with similar issues. Another focus group was held during a Transitional Living Program skills development group and with the survey participants from the May Fest.

The primary needs of young people as identified by the focus groups were the need for reliable housing, a job, a significant person in their life, and a safe place to be.

Highlights from the focus groups follow:

The qualities they look for in another person were: easy to talk to, same gender, someone who will stay connected, make you feel wanted and unhurried, gives you respect, doesn't drill you with questions, is empathetic, but doesn't pity you.

The young adults spoke about the hurdles they faced: deaths in their families, not having a stable home, isolation, having no one to talk to, uncomfortable talking with an adult, not having specific programs set up for teens only (i.e. drugs and alcohol).

These young adults identified that most of them would be more comfortable speaking with someone their own age because "most of them have gone through a lot of the same stuff and I could connect with them."

Using the information from the forums, the young workers acted as the catalyst for the development of the youth outreach concept. They developed a list of attributes that this person should have which became a cornerstone of the job description for the Youth Outreach Worker. The entire YIT planning team endorsed this concept enthusiastically.

In addition to developing surveys, facilitating focus groups, and collating all the information, the young members updated and expanded the inventory of youth services. The young adults attained the information by contacting and visiting the organizations and services.

The youth members also attended the Youth Conference held in May and the Sequential Intercept Model Training in July.

The regional plan is built upon the work of the summits, the YIT planning team, the youth surveys, and the focus groups.

Data to support the plan

There are some disturbing trends in Bennington. Bennington has the highest rate of young teen pregnancy and new families at risk in the state. This number is on the rise even though there are good interventions in place. The Summits on Youth and the Bennington Early Childhood Regional Plan identified young teen pregnancy and new families at risk as a priority issue. The program model developed during Youth in Transition planning process will support current efforts at targeting this priority group.

The Mount Anthony Union High School Principal has a “one student at a time” philosophy as a way of making a difference in the school success rate. MAUHS has the benefit of having access to a successful mentoring program, Quantum Leap. Quantum Leap was created in 2000 to help support students who are often truant and at risk of dropping out. Although Quantum Leap is wildly successful, the graduation rate for children living in poverty is almost half of the rate of those children not living in poverty:

The 2007-2008 graduation rates at Mount Anthony Union High School

	Description	MAUHS Rate	Vermont Rate	MAUHS enrolled at end of 4 yrs	# of Students
Event Rate	(percentage of 12 grade students promoted) by (adjusted enrollment for 12 grade)	84.64%	92%	5.57%	293 Students
Cohort	(percentage of students enrolled who graduate) within 4 years of entering ninth grade	75.74%	85.54%	5.57	293 Students
Free Lunch	% of students receiving free lunch to graduate in 4 years -	50%	Not available	12.5%	120 Students
Non Free Lunch	% of students who do not qualify for free lunch -	92.43	Not available	1.08%	185 Students

Bennington has 59 people under the age of 25 in prison with 28 of them age 21 and younger. This is the second highest number of young people in the state, almost four times the number of young adults incarcerated in a similar area of Brattleboro. Statewide the number of youth and young adults incarcerated has declined. The number of adults, 22 to 25 and older adults, who are incarcerated, has increased. This is a trend that needs to be addressed locally with prevention strategies that wrap services around a young person in order to change the dynamic.

In comparing Bennington to Brattleboro, whose population is virtually the same, the numbers are staggering:

Brattleboro Population: 15,639

- 579 Marijuana users
- 253 abuse prescription drugs
- 94 cocaine addicts
- 43 using hallucinogens
- 5 heroin addicts
- Tobacco will take 17 lives
- There will be at least 73 people arrested for drug charges and 55 DUI's

Bennington Population: 15,737

- 759 Marijuana users
- 332 abuse prescription drugs
- 124 cocaine addicts
- 56 using hallucinogens
- 7 heroin addicts
- Tobacco will take 22 lives
- There will be at least 95 people arrested for drug charges and 72 DUI's

(information obtained from www.bestplaces.net/crime)

Bennington has high numbers for youth who are incarcerated, high rates of teen pregnancy and high rates of youth dropping out of school. The high numbers of families living in poverty add to the complexity of the challenges facing our youth and young adults. Poverty is the primary cultural issue in Bennington that needs to be addressed.

Outcomes and Deliverables

Initially the program will focus on transition age youth residing in the towns that are part of the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union (SVSU) The SVSU consists of towns with the greatest number of youth who did not graduate from high school, highest teen pregnancy rate, highest incarceration rate, and highest rate of youth living in poverty. Over the course of the grant, the Youth Outreach Coordinator will make a concerted effort to reach out to the North Shire community.

Deliverables:

1. Youth Outreach Program will become an integral part of the transition age youth service delivery system
2. Youth Services Council will become an integral part of the local system of care
3. Youth Advisory Council will become an integral part of the system of care
4. Summit on Youth will become institutionalized within the system of care
5. A training program for Youth Outreach Workers and mentors will be institutionalized within the local system of care.
6. Youth and young adults will participate in civic decision making with membership on the United Way board, Juvenile Justice Panels, and town government.
7. All program youth and young adults will participate in evaluation

Outcomes:

Bennington County will experience an increase in student high school completion rates.

Bennington County will experience a decrease in the number of youth and young adults involved in the criminal justice system.

Bennington County youth will decrease use of the ER.

An Increase number of Bennington County youth and young adults will have an identified medical and dental home.

Bennington County youth are engaged in meaningful and supportive relationships.

A Center for Youth will become a reality in Bennington County.

Attachments

Attachment A: Bennington Youth in Transition Regional Plan

Attachment B: Bennington Youth Services Inventory- August 2009

Attachment C: UCS Organizational Chart

Attachment D: Specialized Children's Services (SCS) Organizational Chart

Attachment E: Board Organizational Chart

Attachment F: Youth Outreach Coordinator job description

Attachment G: Youth in Transition Program Budget