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# REPORT ON SELECTED TRANSITION SERVICES FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES IN MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF EPR

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# 01.

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## INTRODUCTION

The EPR strategic plan for 2013-15 includes, under 'Research & Innovation', the objectives to commission topical research and draft comparative papers and studies that have relevancy for each member, the EPR organisations and the disability communities and programmes in the European Union. The suggestion was made by the EPR members to involve the expertise of staff within the membership to achieve this aim. The studies are completed by the EPR member organisations for the benefit of all interested parties. In 2012, the EPR conducted a study on 'the impact of the economic crisis on the rights of people with disabilities' under a subcontract from the European Foundation Centre. This experience demonstrated the capability of EPR to conduct such high-level studies, and demonstrated the hugely positive impact for EPR in terms of profiling influence and acquired knowledge for all the EPR members.

## 02.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY ON TRANSITION SERVICES FOR YOUTH

The purpose of this Transition Study is to understand the various programmes and approaches that EPR members are using with transition age youth (ages 14 to 24 and beyond) to increase their independence and inclusion in the community. Based on these programmes and approaches, there are specific themes that are replicated among the EPR members and unique approaches that will inform future programmes and developments. Finally, there are challenges, opportunities and directions for the future identified by the EPR members regarding recommendations for programme development.

## 03.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON EPR

The EPR is a network of leading European providers of rehabilitation services for people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups. EPR member organisations are influential in their countries and stand for high quality service delivery in the fields of vocational rehabilitation, vocational education and training, reintegration, medical rehabilitation and social care.

### **EPR Vision**

EPR contributes to a society where every person with a disability or other disadvantages accesses the highest quality services that create equal opportunities and independent participation in society. EPR intends to 're-think' and 're-invent' service provisions as well as service providers with the aim to match reintegration and participation of clients with the newest developments of a market driven by objectives and outcomes.

### **EPR Mission**

The mission of the EPR network is to assist its member organisations to achieve continuous professional improvement, best practices and sustainable growth

in every aspect of service delivery for people with disabilities and other disadvantages. Through its Public Affairs activities, the EPR enables service providers to contribute to the formulation of European social policy and legislation, as well as facilitating access to EU funding.

### **EPR Partnership agreement with the European Commission**

In each year of the four-year partnership agreement with the European Commission, the EPR will produce a comparative study on a defined theme. The identified themes for the period from 2014 through 2017 include:

- Transition services for young people with disabilities (2014).
- Application of EU procurement rules on Social Services (2015).
- Empowerment (2016).
- Person-Centeredness (2017).

The objective with each comparative study is the production of a thematic reference document with comparable data and reliable facts and figures from the field, as well as recommendations for policy makers and service providers. The studies, conducted by a central coordination team (the EPR Secretariat staff and one or two external experts) and the EPR members, provide data and recommendations on each of the four identified themes. The costs for involving external experts and the time of the Secretariat staff are covered by the Structural Funding Grant. The EPR members provide the time of their experts from their staff. Each of the four themes will commence with a planning group in the beginning of the calendar year and be completed by the end of the calendar year through the discussion of the findings and the publishing of the final report.

### **The 2014 theme ‘transition services for young people with disabilities’ within the EPR member organisations**

The 2014 primary theme with the European Commission is transition services for young people with disabilities as they complete their formal secondary education and transition to adulthood, postsecondary education, employment and the community. The topic of transition services for young people with disabilities is of great interest to EPR members as they engage in the promotion of community-based services, a positive attitude towards the evolution of service delivery frameworks in Europe, and the importance of rehabilitation in an inclusive society for every individual. These values are commonly held by EPR members and are further described in the 2008 EPR Charter on the modernisation of disability-related health and social services.

The transition theme has always been on the top of the EPR agenda, with a prominent place in several Annual EPR Conferences and individualized Centre Action Plan activities. Many EPR members have extensive experience in the field of transition services and have been acknowledged leaders in their respective communities and countries.

‘Transition Services’ was also defined as priority in the co-operation agreement between EPR and the American Council of State Administrators in Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). The CSAVR organisation is composed of the chief administrators of the public rehabilitation agencies serving individuals with physical and mental disabilities in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the United States’ Territories and Commonwealths. These vocational rehabilitation agencies constitute the state partners in the State/Federal programme of rehabilitation services provided under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

## 04.

## STUDY METHODOLOGY FOR TRANSITION SERVICES

The EPR study of Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities commenced in February 2014. The EPR Secretariat finalized the Transition Services theme and prepared a presentation for approval by the EPR Board in March 2014. The Board approved the proposal. There were three phases in the study. Each of the phases is described below and provides the framework for the resulting concluding observations, comments and recommendations.

### PHASE I

The first phase involved the retention of a researcher to design the methodology and related templates, complete the data gathering and prepare the final report for approval by the EPR Board. Professor Fred R. McFarlane from San Diego State University was selected as the external expert for this study. He is a recognised expert in this field, knows the EPR practices and has facilitated several Centre Action Plans on this theme. Moreover, he is currently involved in a five-year research and demonstration study in California designed to develop and implement innovative transition services for youth with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 20 and their families. Finally, he was asked by CSAVR to facilitate the co-operation with EPR in this field of transition services.

Commencing in March 2014, Professor McFarlane with the staff of the EPR Secretariat designed a Study Protocol that covered all aspects of transition services. The decision was made to use a narrative format for the Study Protocol. The narrative format provides a richness of information from a qualitative perspective and enables each EPR member to describe their programme in terms and examples that are relevant in their communities. The limitation

in using a qualitative model for data gathering is that there is limited comparability among each of the EPR members' transition services. The intent of the Transition Study is to illustrate the multiple strategies that are currently used by participating EPR member organisations. There was no intent to describe every transition service provided by each EPR member organisation.

The study's draft protocol went through a number of iterations to insure that it reflected the key elements of transition services and was applicable to the uniqueness of each of the EPR members, their respective organisational and demographic characteristics, and included language that was comparable across organisations and countries. During this Phase the EPR Secretariat staff solicited input from selected EPR members to review and critique the draft protocol.

The final Protocol had five distinct sections:

- Section I: Transition Programme Information,
- Section II: Transition Student Information,
- Section III: Transition Programme Services and Interventions,
- Section IV: Public Authority/Legislative Information,
- Section V: Transition Programme Directions.

A total of 21 separate items are contained in the five Sections. The final approved Protocol is provided in Annex I.

To facilitate the ease of completing the Study Protocol, the instrument was converted to a web-based format. The web-based format enabled each EPR member to submit its response to each item of the Study Protocol and electronically provide any attachments that were considered relevant. The EPR member also had the ability to submit the completed Protocol as a Word document and transmit it through email. Prior to distributing the web-based protocol, the website was pilot tested to insure accessibility, ease of data input and compilation and translation of the submitted data.

In June 2014, the Study Protocol was distributed to EPR members during the annual conference in

Cologne, Germany. EPR members were asked to identify one or more staff members who would assume responsibility for compiling the data for the Study Protocol for their respective organisations. It was agreed the EPR Secretariat staff would contact each EPR member organisation immediately following the annual conference to insure that all were aware of the Study Protocol, the website site access and the timelines for completion of the Study Protocol.

As noted, Annex I includes the final Study Protocol and suggestions for the type and nature of the information that was relevant for each item in the Protocol. This Study Protocol was available to the EPR member organisations through the website and as a Word document.

## PHASE 2

The data collection at the individual organisational level was conducted between July 1, 2014 and September 30, 2014. There were 16 EPR member organisations that eventually completed the Study Protocol (note: Heliomare completed two Study Protocols). The participating countries and the EPR member organisations were:

*Belgium:* GTB gespecialiseerde trajectbepaling en-begeleiding

*Estonia:* Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre

*Finland:* Luovi Vocational College (Hengitysliittory/ Ammattiopisto Luovi)

*Germany:* Benediktushof gGmbH (“Absolventen-Management”)

*Germany:* Berufsbildungswerk Südhessen gemeinnützige GmbH (Residence Consultancy)

*Germany:* Berufsbildungswerk Südhessen gemeinnützige GmbH (Qualification – Integration)

*Germany:* Vinzenz-von-Paul-Berufskolleg (Vocational College)

*Hungary:* Mozgássérült Emberek Rehabilitációs Központja (MEREK)

*Ireland:* Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA)

*Ireland:* National Learning Network

*Netherlands:* Adelante

*Netherlands:* Heliomare (Talent Expedition and Vocational Rehabilitation)

*Netherlands:* Pluryn Rea College

*Norway:* GREP

*Portugal:* Fundação Afid Diferença

*Spain:* FSC INSERTA (ONCE Foundation’s human resources company)

The researcher reviewed each completed Study Protocol. If there were questions in the identification and definition of specific terms, abbreviations and areas that were not fully described, the researcher communicated with the identified contact person(s) in the EPR member organisation to seek clarity. This iterative process of clarification occurred between September 15, 2014 and November 14, 2014. A graduate assistant (Vanessa Corona), enrolled in the Master of Science degree in Rehabilitation Counseling at San Diego State University, reviewed each Protocol for clarity, format and consistency. Finally, the researcher retained an editor to read each completed Study Protocol to insure formatting and editorial consistency among all of the individual Study Protocols.

To keep the richness and uniqueness of each Study Protocol, care was given to insure the statements and wording reflected the intent and descriptions provided by the EPR member organisation. There was no intent to make each Study Protocol read identically. From a qualitative research perspective, we kept the richness of the descriptions provided by each EPR member.

Annex 2 provides the verbatim response of each EPR member organisation’s Study Protocol. The readers are encouraged to examine each Study Protocol to learn about the specific approaches and strategies used by each EPR member organisation.

## PHASE 3

The third phase involved the analysis of the 17 completed Study Protocols and the development of observations, commonalities, challenges, opportunities and recommendations. This phase commenced in October 2014 and was concluded in December 2014. The EPR Secretariat reviewed and approved the final draft report. On December

3, 2014 the final draft report was presented to approximately 50 participants during the EPR Public Affairs Seminar in Brussels, Belgium. The presentation involved a videoconference with the researcher and presentations by two of the Study Protocol participating EPR member organisations (i.e., GTB: gespecialiseerde trajectbepaling enbegeleiding, and ONC'E: FSC INSERTA). The results of the Seminar, including the questions and responses, were integrated in the final report. The EPR Secretariat distributed the final report to its members and other community providers and organisations throughout the European Union.

**Summary of the Methodology** The three phases of the Study Methodology used a participatory model of research. There was extensive input from the EPR Secretariat, the Study Protocol was refined to insure completeness and clarity, and the EPR member organisations selected representative transition services. There was a literature review to identify

trends in transition services and the needs of youth with disabilities and other disadvantages.

The bibliography included with the report provides selected resources for further consideration. The findings, challenges, opportunities and suggestions emerged from the data and in discussions with various service providers. This Study is intended to serve as a rich resource for practitioners and administrators as they develop and refine their transition services for youth with disabilities.

## 05.

### INDIVIDUAL PROTOCOL FINDINGS BY SECTION

The following provides a summary of each Section of the Study Protocol for all of the responses. These are provided in a narrative format. Interspersed with the summary findings are examples from individual Study Protocols. Further, Annex 3 provides an abbreviated summary of each item for all of the Protocols. Annex 3 is a quick reference guide for you to use as you examine each item.

#### SECTION I Transition Programme Information

This section included the goal of the transition programme, outcome measures for the programme, the theory or theories used for the programme, the year the programme started, staffing patterns for the transition programme and the physical location of the transition programme.

##### **Discussion:**

When reviewing the stated goals, the majority of responses focused on achieving integration and inclusion in the community. These included development of independent living situations and the skills to be self-sufficient (i.e., Hungary, Adelante in the Netherlands and the Irish Wheelchair Association). A number of the programmes focused on enabling the persons to secure vocational training and/or employment. These included the programmes in Germany, Estonia, Netherlands and Finland. Other



programmes concentrated on transition from secondary education to postsecondary education including efforts in Norway and Finland. The outcome measures identified by the programmes typically combined both quantitative and qualitative responses. Often these outcome measures examined completion rates from education and vocational training programmes as well as employment rates for transition participants. There are also qualitative measures for a number of the programmes. These include living independently, completion of educational experiences and accomplishing transition plans and supporting educational attainments. The range of outcome measures provided numerous opportunities for examining individual changes and development.

The primary theory that was used in 50% of the programmes involved person centred/person driven approaches. Assumed under this theory were approaches for individual empowerment and self-determination. There were also programmes that were developed based on the principles of independent living that focused on individualized plans and services. A limited number of programmes indicated that there was not a specific theory that was used for the transition programme development. When reading these Protocols, it was evident that the actual transition services were embedded in other comprehensive programmes.

When examining the beginning dates of the transition programmes, 10 of the programmes began since 2010. Four of the programmes began in the decade of 2000-2009. The programmes at Pluryn, Norway and Finland have been in operation for over 20 years. The emergence of transition programmes in the past few years can be attributed to the movement to inclusive education, the development of education and training programmes that are directed to employment and community integration, and the increasing importance of independence and self-sufficiency for persons with disabilities.

The staffing patterns were relatively consistent among the programmes. In most instances, there were one or two full-time staff and a number of staff members assigned part-time to the programmes. The staff represented various disciplines from

multiple therapies, education, vocational training and the myriad of support services necessary for the person with a disability. The use of a team approach to services seemed to dominate the programmes. There was an impressive array of personnel from multiple disciplines who participated in the various programmes.

Finally, there was a discussion of the programme location. Most of the programmes were located in the centre offices and building complexes. The programmes in Finland and Spain and one of the programmes in Germany provided services throughout their respective countries. The programme in Belgium is located in schools and most recently in local job centres. Others such as Hungary are located in care homes or in the city centre's independent living homes (i.e., Adelante). It appears that the resources (i.e., physical facilities, training resources, educational programmes and the locations of the persons with a disability) dictate the physical location of the programmes. It is impressive that many of the programmes appear to be located in the community and/or are co-located with other programmes that serve individuals without disabilities.

## SECTION II Transition Student Information

This Section includes a description of the targeted students who are admitted to the programme, the number of students currently in the programme, those completing the programme and the involvement of family members.

### **Discussion:**

It was quite interesting to see the range and background experiences of the targeted students for the transition programmes. The range was from 13 (in one of the German programmes) or 14 (in Spain) to ages that continued to age 45 (in one of the Heliomare programmes) and 65 (in Ireland). The most common ages were from 16 to the mid-20s. Most programmes were open to all persons with disabilities. The selection criteria typically targeted individuals who were either in school or were transitioning from an educational experience either to community living, additional

educational experiences or work experiences and/or employment. The diversity of the targeted students who were admitted to the programmes was quite varied. It illustrates that the programmes are targeting the needs of individuals in their respective communities and programmes.

The enrolment of students in the programmes was very different. There were a number of programmes that had a limited enrolment (i.e., Hungary and one of the Heliomare programmes admitted, on average, nine participants) to the programmes in Finland, Spain and Belgium that have more than 500 enrolled students at any one time. It appears that the enrolment targets are driven by the nature of the programme, the availability of qualified staff, the financial and programmatic resources and the needs of the consumers. The completion rates varied among the programmes. Since there are no common measures across the programmes with regard to comparability, no attempt is made to compare the results among the 17 programmes. In reviewing the individual programmes, there are a number of successful programmes regarding positive outcomes such as employment, independent living, additional work experiences and/or educational and vocational training experiences.

The final item in this Section inquired about family involvement in the transition programmes. In reviewing the responses, the family members are typically involved if the students are under age 18. The involvement with these students ranges from obtaining permission and agreement for the transition services to providing support for the students to expand their connections within the community. For those programmes where the students were 18 years or older, family members were typically encouraged to participate but it was not mandatory. A number of the programmes encourage family engagement and participation. The most typical areas of participation involved supporting the student to achieve independence, using community friendships and connections to assist the students with community placements and employment, and reinforcing expected behaviours for their individualized transition plans.

### SECTION III Transition Programme

**Services and Intervention** This Section includes a description of the Transition Programme activities, activities involving family and community members, instruments used in the Transition Programme and employer involvement.

#### **Discussion:**

The initial item in this Section addresses the activities that occur during the Transition Programme. The activities are quite varied among the respondents. As an example, GTB in Belgium uses a structured five-step process that enables the student to explore their wants, skills and then their respective plans for transition. Astangu in Estonia uses a team model, while others such as the NLN in Ireland and GREP in Norway use individualized services and person-centred planning. ONCE (Spain) is promoting entrepreneurship that supports autonomy, creativity and provides encouragement for persons with disabilities. A number of programmes use strategies to develop soft skills and strengthen the knowledge of the labour market and development of community inclusion behaviours. The individual protocols (Annex 2) provide excellent details on the individual organisational activities. As noted previously, the use of individual planning instruments are shared with the student and, in many instances, their families.

As noted previously, the family involvement varies with the individual programmes. In most instances, the parents are involved in the planning process. In selected programmes, the family is involved in follow-up and progress meetings. Further, families are encouraged to use their connections in their local communities to help with job searches and, potentially, work experience opportunities. Selected programmes do not involve parents or family members in any formal manner. The rationale was to strengthen the independence for the students.

Community members include other community agencies, schools, employers, other government entities and NGOs. Because of the individualized nature of many of the programmes, the involvement and levels of responsibilities for community members vary. The programmes that are school based often deferred in the engagement of community members

to the school personnel. Those that have primarily an employment focus (i.e., Pluryn in the Netherlands, two of the German programmes and Heliomare in the Netherlands) engage employers in work experiences, internships and/or paid employment. Of the 17 programmes, only two indicated that there was no direct community involvement.

The results addressing the instruments used during the programmes were interesting. The vast majority of respondents used instruments that were developed specifically for the programme. Many included planning instruments that were used to develop a plan of services and serve as a means for follow-up progress. Where assessment instruments are used, they are targeted to the needs of the student. Two organisations use Hamel (Estonia and one of the German programmes). Finland uses an instrument that supports national certification. Finally, the NLN in Ireland uses the Pathways to Independence Outcome Start in House Independent Living Travel Assessment.

The final item in this Section addressed employer involvement. Most programmes engaged employers in various aspects of the transition programme. As an example, Heliomare conducts periodic employer forums. These forums provided a connectedness for the employers with the students and the programme staff. In a number of instances, employers were involved in mentoring and coaching with the programme participants. Employers also participated in on-the-job learning efforts, internships and work experiences. They participated in simulated interviews and assistance in reviewing resumes for the students. Finally in selected programmes employers benefitted from wage subsidy and funding for internships, job trials and employment.

## **SECTION IV**

### **Public Authority/Legislative Information**

This Section includes a description of the legal basis for the Transition Programme and the funding basis for the Programme.

#### **Discussion:**

The legal basis for 15 of the 17 programmes is linked to existing legal authority or legislation in the

respective countries. In reviewing the responses, the legislative mandates are typically in education, vocational training, social security, and labour and/or employment preparation. It is impressive to see the creativity and uniqueness of the legal basis for each programme. The legislative supports provide a solid framework for programme development and sustainability. It was interesting to note that most of the programmes developed from an identified need by the students and the staff. The legislative support provided the legal and administrative framework for implementation. It was apparent that there is extensive latitude for the respective programmes to be developed, implemented and refined. This is often a delegated authority to the organisation and its management team.

The funding base for the programmes was developed through multiple approaches. In selected organisations, the costs for the programme were covered through their base budget that was supported by various government entities. In other programmes, there are specific funding resources that have been acquired from government organisations. In some instances, there are annual allocations that are linked to the number of students. This formula constitutes per-student funding based on enrolments, retention and completion. In selected programmes, there are collaborations with school districts where the funding is covered by the school districts through either special education or regular education funding. In selected programmes, there is special funding through either a grant programme or a specific contract. These programmes are time-limited and often are demonstrating a specific approach to transition. Finally, one programme in German is in the start-up phase and the participating staff is volunteering their time during this developmental stage.

## **SECTION V**

### **Transition Programme Directions**

This Section describes the challenges and opportunities with the individual transition programmes. There is also an item that addresses future directions from the perspective of the organisation. For clarity in presentation, each of these items is discussed below.

**Discussion (challenges):**

The challenges identified by the 17 programmes clustered in three main themes. First, a number of programmes are in their initial stages of implementation (as noted by the number of programmes that have begun since 2010). They have experienced success with the students and have identified additional needs as well as the complexity of the concerns and challenges by the students. Therefore, the challenge is two-fold – how do you manage the growth of the programmes for increasing student interest and the increasingly complex needs of the individual students. As an example, GTB in Belgium has increased from 100 students to over 500 students during the past few years. They are offering their programme to an expanding group of students, and the challenge is insuring quality and individualization at the same time that they are expanding.

The second theme is to insure stable funding to maintain sustainability of the programmes. A number of the programmes were started with project funds that are time limited or there are anticipated changes in the national legislation. As the projects approach their specific ending date, there is a concern about continuation and sustainability. This is being experienced in Ireland with the Irish Wheelchair Association, one of the Heliomare programmes, and a change in the legislation potentially impacting Pluryn in the Netherlands. Because the programmes often serve individuals for an extended period of time (i.e., longer than 6 months), the issue of sustainability of funding and the flexibility to direct the funds to emerging needs of the students and the community is an ongoing challenge.

The third theme is addressing attitudes and support from the greater community. These challenges include community attitudes regarding productivity and competencies of students with disability. There is a continued need to educate the community (i.e., employers, funders and local and national governments) regarding the transition programmes. The movement to inclusive education and person-centered planning continue to be challenging for other sectors of the community. Finally, there are changing economic and employment conditions in the respective countries. These changes are impacting economic resources and employment opportunities.

**Discussion (opportunities)**

The opportunities identified by the 17 programmes clustered in two themes. The first common theme is making a difference for the students and expanding the opportunities for the students to be increasingly independent in the community. A component of this opportunity is an expansion of the programmes to additional consumer groups. These opportunities include working with mainstream education programmes, expanding to college students and offering the programmes to expanding consumer groups within the EPR member's respective organisations. Programmes in Germany, Finland, the Netherlands and Portugal identified these opportunities.

The second common theme is the expansion of connections with employers and other community groups including organisations representing specific disability groups. As an example, Pluryn sees opportunities to increase the involvement of labour orientation, integrated training courses and support for employers. The NLN in Ireland is planning to implement their programme throughout the country. Finally, Finland is expanding partnerships with employers, other service providers and the Finnish government. These expanded connections provide opportunities (and challenges) to increase inclusion and community engagement.

**Discussion (strengthening the programme)**

The strengthening of the programmes clustered around two themes. The first theme addressed the sustainability of the programmes. This theme involves a myriad of issues. These issues include integrating with the other education programmes, developing linkages with government programmes, increasing consumer involvement and expanding geographically throughout either regions or the country. In the area of sustainability, there is also the demand to insure sufficient qualified staff members to retain the programme's growth and focus. As an example, Portugal discussed having different programmes for the youth and insuring that the staff had the competencies to support both the students and the community members.

The second area addressed community awareness and engagement. There is a continued need to insure relevancy to other sectors of the community including employers, consumer organisations,

government entities and potential partners. As an example, Pluryn intends to strengthen its external orientation through increasing stakeholder engagement and broadening the targeted students to include persons with other disabling conditions.

**Summary of the Individual Protocols:**

The summary of the individual protocols provides a view of the 17 separate programmes. There are common elements among the programmes that are identified above. However, it is also very apparent that the strength of these programmes is the individualized nature of the services and the targeted approaches used by the respective EPR member organisations.

## 06.

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### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The concluding observations and future directions for the EPR member organisations' transition programmes are derived from the review of the 17 Study Protocols, discussions with colleagues in the EPR member organisations, the review of relevant literature and the experiences of the researcher.

### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The study of selected transition practices in the member organisations of the EPR is informative and reflects multiple approaches to serving the needs of youth with disabilities and, when appropriate, their families. In reviewing the 17 Study Protocols (see Annex 2 and 3), the programmes are individualized to the country, the organisation and, most importantly, the identified needs of the youth and adults. In most EPR member organisations the programmes are shaped by Legislation and/or Government policies that provide a framework for the provision of services to youth and, in some instances, a specific focus on services with youth with disabilities.

It is interesting to note that the EU or country legislative mandates are typically in labour, education, insurance and/or healthcare. These

legislative mandates cross the spectrum of human service policies. When examining these transition practices, EU funding, such as the European Social Fund, supports selected programmes. Other financial supports come from the government and, in selected situations, are covered through organisational funding or shared funding with other organisations such as educational institutions or labour programmes. Finally, the programmes are consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. While not always referenced in the Study Protocols, the goals, outcomes and transition interventions are consistent with the key elements of the Convention.

Virtually all of the programmes have a focus on inclusion and integration in the community. In selected instances, the programmes were originally developed for students with disabilities and are now being expanded to include students without disabilities who may need additional supports as they transition to adult life. There is a distinct movement away from segregated programmes exclusively for students with disabilities. This movement is strengthened by the focus on, and discussion of, person-centred and person-driven transition interventions. This person-centred/driven focus provides for an individualized approach to transition for the youth and young adults. Most of the programmes use selection criteria that are linked to educational and behavioural characteristics – not a specific disabling condition or gender. These selection criteria further support the individualized nature of the transition interventions.

The most common focus of the transition interventions addresses “soft skills”. These soft skills help the youth transition from school to adult life. As an example, these soft skills include: knowledge and abilities about study skills as well as academic and vocational education achievement; identifying employment opportunities; interviewing; resume development; and, demonstrating appropriate behaviours while working. There are selected programmes that also assist in the development and acquisition of specific vocational skills that will strengthen the student’s employability. In the area of work skills there are a number of opportunities for internships, trial work experiences, on-the-job training and related work transition efforts. Two of the programmes target the development of independent living skills and community self-sufficiency. The

partnerships with educational institutions (both high school and post-high school education and training) provide a positive linkage that crosses organisational systems.

When reviewing the staffing for the programmes, virtually all are using an interdisciplinary model. Most programmes have a limited number of full time staff and also engage staff from multiple disciplines. The representation of the various disciplines is impressive. The staff has a wealth of knowledge and capabilities when providing support for the youth, their families (if applicable) and the community partners. The challenge is creating and sustaining a coordinated teamwork approach that remains focused on the youth and supports a continuum of services – not solely individual disciplinary services and supports. The leadership and the coordination of these multi-disciplinary teams to insure the focus is on the student is a definite challenge.

Finally, two of the emerging challenges for the transition programmes evolve around sustainability and insuring there are both quantitative and qualitative outcome measures to demonstrate positive developments. These two challenges – sustainability and documented outcomes – present challenges for most programmes and are critical for long-term viability of the transition services.

a) The issue of sustainability was mentioned by a number of the programmes. As the economic conditions change and the demands for services increase, there are issues with continued multi-year funding and sufficient support for staff to meet the continuing needs of the youth. Government and organisational funding remains a concern. There is an effort at the government level in many countries to consolidate programmes and reduce the costs of services. This is challenging given that the transition needs of youth and young adults with disabilities typically are individualized (as noted by the nature of these programmes), labour intensive and often time consuming.

b) This need for sustainability requires that the programmes provide both quantitative and qualitative measures of accomplishments. As noted, a number of the programmes are relatively new and have not developed a robust database of accomplishments.

Further, when addressing “soft skills”, as noted above, the compilation of quantifiable outcome data can be challenging. Programmes provide both quantitative and qualitative measures of accomplishments. As noted, a number of the programmes are relatively new and have not developed a robust database of accomplishments. Further, when addressing “soft skills”, as noted above, the compilation of quantifiable outcome data can be challenging.

These concluding observations provide a basis for identifying the future directions and efforts of transition programmes.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There is no question that the youth with disabilities have significant needs as they transition from education to adult life. The literature and research is compelling - human services, education, labour and healthcare policies must support community integration and independence for all individuals. The challenges are equally compelling. There is not a singular approach or set of policies and practices that will work for all individuals. Therefore, the individualization of transition interventions is critical and labour intensive. Finally, if there is failure to provide effective transition interventions, the long term negative impact on these individuals will be significant for years to come.

When reviewing the Study Protocols, there are six areas that seem critical for future developments.

### 1) Increase outcome data and study the financial benefits of the transition efforts.

**Discussion:** Many of the identified transition programmes commenced in the last 10 years. It is critical to demonstrate the benefits of these programmes with individuals. The data needs to examine both programme completion and the sustainability of individual accomplishments that occur in post-transition interventions. This includes examining the ability of the individual to strengthen their independence and contribution in the community. If these outcome measures can be

combined with financial benefits and factors such as “return on investment” and contributions to the community, this will strengthen the discussions with policy makers and funding organisations to provide sustainability and, hopefully, growth of the transition interventions.

### 2) Strive for public policy sustainability that is essential for long-term transition efforts.

**Discussion:** There is a continued need to educate policy makers regarding the importance of transition programmes. The data in most EU countries reflect high unemployment rates for youth and young adults. Often, this unemployment rate is more than double the rates for the general population. These youth and young adults, regardless of their circumstances, are the future income producers. Therefore, developing programmes that assist these individuals to become competent and productive is important. This is increasingly important for youth with disabilities who often have to address a number of challenges. The education of policy makers must be a consistent and constant process and must emphasize the importance of individualization of transition interventions with comparable outcome measures. We know, as demonstrated by the 17 Study Protocols and the literature, that “one size does not fit all individuals”. Individualization is a key element of transition programmes and needs to be included in the education of policy makers.

### 3) Continue person-centred/driven services for transition programmes.

**Discussion:** As noted in the Study Protocols, most EPR member organisations utilize a person-centred approach to the transition services. The development of person-centred/driven services has had a re-emergence in the last decade. The focus is on the individual and the designing of transition interventions that are unique to the person. While intensive in development, it provides a strong foundation for the individual and their family and support systems. This service approach also offers opportunities to expand options for the individual and increase future positive outcomes.

#### 4) Increase family support and engagement in the transition interventions

**Discussion:** In reviewing the Study Protocols, there were variances in the engagement of family members and other significant persons in the lives of the youth and young adults who were served in the programmes. Engaging the family members in the process can assist in three ways. First, it will help the family members view the youth in a different manner as they are entering community inclusion. This will enable family members to see the skills and abilities of their student. Second, the family members may be able to assist with community connections – from living arrangements to work experiences. Third, they will be able to provide continuing support once the transition programme ends. Studying various models and considering the engagement of the family members to support the individual receiving transition interventions adds another dimension of community inclusion.

#### 5) Strengthen employer engagement from the conception of transition programmes.

**Discussion:** The engagement of the employer community in the planning, development and implementation of the transition interventions strengthens long-term success and community support. This engagement becomes a learning opportunity for the employers, the youth and the service providers. A number of Study Protocols identified employer involvement. They are to be commended for these efforts. The earlier their involvement the more employers will be engaged and contributing to the programme's success.

#### 6) Retain EPR's long-term commitment to transition efforts.

**Discussion:** EPR has included transition efforts in its Centre Action Plans and its Strategic Plans for a number of years. This recognition has increased the dialogue among member organisations and resulted in sharing of expertise and approaches. As noted in selected Study Protocols, the sharing of this experience has influenced the programme developments. A continuation of this focus and a sharing of expertise among the EPR member organisations have proven to be valuable. Continuing

this priority and recognition is strongly encouraged by EPR and its member organisations.

## SUMMATION

The 17 Transition Protocols of the EPR member organisations in this study provide a range of approaches that serve youth and young adults with disabilities. They are varied in their transition interventions and utilize individualized approaches. The key element is that all are striving for community integration and inclusion. We know that each individual is unique and has a set of skills and abilities that must be developed and adapted to achieve community integration. We know that innovation, collaboration and constant attention to the needs of the person with the disability is critical for the success of each programme. The examples and innovations articulated by these programmes provide opportunities for young adults with disabilities to become contributing members of their communities. Continued innovation, individualization and positive outcomes with benefit the individual, their family, the community and their country.



## 07.

## KEY MESSAGES FROM THE STUDY

The theme of the study is transition services for young people with disabilities as they complete their formal secondary education and transition to adulthood, postsecondary education, employment and the community. The intent of the Study is to understand the various programmes and approaches that EPR members are using with transition age youth (ages 14 to 24 and beyond) to increase their independence and inclusion in the community, and to make concluding observations and recommendations. This document focuses on the observations and future directions.

### EMERGING CHALLENGES FOR THE TRANSITION PROGRAMMES

As economic conditions change and the demands for services increase, there are issues with continued multi-year funding and sufficient support for staff to meet the continuing needs of the youth. Government and organisational funding remains a concern. There is an effort at the government level in many countries to consolidate programmes and reduce the costs of services. This is challenging given that the transition needs of youth and young adults with disabilities typically are individualized (as noted by the nature of these programmes), labour intensive and often time consuming.

This need for sustainability requires that the programmes provide both quantitative and qualitative measures of accomplishments. As noted, a number of the programmes are relatively new and have not developed a robust database of accomplishments. Further, when addressing “soft skills”, as noted above, the compilation of quantifiable outcome data can be challenging;

### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The literature and research is compelling - human services, education, labour and healthcare policies must support community integration and independence for all individuals. There is not a singular approach or set of policies and practices that will work for all individuals. Therefore, the individualization of transition interventions is critical and labour intensive. Finally, if there is failure to provide effective transition interventions, the long term negative impact on these individuals will be significant for years to come. Six recommendations drawn from the study can be found below.

#### 1) Increase outcome data and study the financial benefits of the transition efforts.

The data needs to examine both programme completion and the sustainability of individual accomplishments that occur in post-transition interventions. This includes examining the ability of the individual to strengthen their independence and contribution in the community. If these outcome measures can be combined with financial benefits and factors such as “return on investment” and contributions to the community, this will strengthen the discussions with policy makers and funding organisations to provide sustainability and, hopefully, growth of the transition interventions;

#### 2) Strive for public policy sustainability that is essential for long-term transition efforts.

There is a continued need to educate policy makers regarding the importance of transition programmes. The data in most EU countries reflect high unemployment rates for youth and young adults. Developing programmes that assist these individuals to become competent and productive is increasingly important for youth with disabilities who often have to address a number of challenges. The education of policy makers

must be a consistent and constant process and must emphasize the importance of individualization of transition interventions with comparable outcome measures.

### **3) Continue person-centred/driven services for transition programmes**

As noted in the Study Protocols, most EPR member organisations utilize a person-centred approach to the transition services. While intensive in development, it provides a strong foundation for the individual and their family and support systems. This service approach also offers opportunities to expand options for the individual and increase future positive outcomes.

### **4) Increase family support and engagement in the transition interventions**

Engaging the family members in the process can assist in three ways. First, it will help the family members view the youth in a different manner as they are entering community inclusion. This will enable family members to see the skills and abilities of their student. Second, the family members may be able to assist with community connections. Third, they will be able to provide continuing support once the transition programme ends. Studying various models and considering the engagement of the family members to support the individual receiving transition interventions adds another dimension of community inclusion.

### **5) Strengthen employer engagement from the conception of transition programmes**

The engagement of the employer community in the planning, development and implementation of the transition interventions strengthens long-term success and community support. The earlier their involvement the more employers will be engaged and contributing to the programme's success.

### **6) Retain EPR's long-term commitment to transition efforts**

EPR has included transition efforts in its Centre Action Plans and its Strategic Plans for a number of years. This recognition has increased the dialogue

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## STUDY ANNEXES AVAILABLE ON EPR WEBSITE

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[www.epr.eu/index.php/transition/510](http://www.epr.eu/index.php/transition/510)

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