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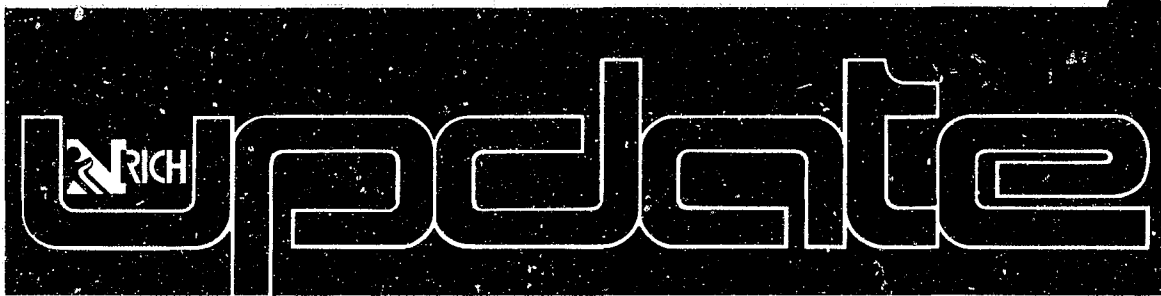
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NATIONAL RESOURCE INSTITUTE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH HANDICAPS
Child Development and Mental Retardation Center

**Planning for Transition from Title IV-E Foster Care
for Youth with Developmental Disabilities**

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Thousands of young people leave the foster care system each year and enter the community as independent members of society. A large number of these young people have no resources or skills to sustain themselves in an independent living environment and will need assistance in making the transition from foster care to independent living. This is a complex agenda for young people, even when they enjoy full health and physical ability, are unencumbered by any major childhood social or family trauma, and have the necessary personal resources to prepare themselves for adult life or business.

The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-272), through addition of Section 477 to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, authorizes funds to States for service programs and activities to assist eligible children (age 16 and over) in Title IV-E Foster Care in making the transition from foster care to independent living. States are encouraged to use various methods and strategies to achieve the objectives of this initiative.

Services, Activities Suggested

The program instructions suggest that the following services and activities be developed and offered to transitioning youths: counseling and instruction in basic living skills, money management, home management, consumer skills, parenting, health care, access to community resources, transportation, and housing options and locations. Training programs for agency staff, as well as specialized training and consultation for foster parents and other child care providers, may assist in the development and improvement of an important link for the child between dependence and independence.

States are instructed to view Title IV-E independent living funds as one funding source to be used in combination with other funds to support a comprehensive range of services for all children in foster care. State child welfare agencies are expected to continue to establish and improve relationships with other service programs and organizations, such as vocational rehabilitation, special and vocational education, health care, job training and local housing advisors.

The issues and developmental tasks facing the adolescent who has a developmental disorder are the same as those faced by any other teenager. The transition to independent living for youth with physically and/or intellectually disabling conditions is often hindered by a variety of barriers: economics, lack of preparation, attitudinal problems, lack of available facilities, lack of training, and unfamiliarity with professionals who can facilitate appropriate and achievable levels of independence.

Additional Support Needed

Adolescents who have chronic or lifetime disabilities are at risk for poor adjustment in their transition to maturity, and they will require additional support and assistance to negotiate this transition process successfully. The achievement of satisfactory transition outcomes depends on the quality and appropriateness of the high school curriculum and available services, as well as on the capabilities of care providers in locating appropriate services to facilitate transition.

As we enter the third decade of the deinstitutionalization movement for persons with developmental disabilities, we face the increasingly difficult task of integrating individuals with more severe handicaps into the community. The past 20 years have brought a dramatic turnabout in thinking, policy, and programs, and a shift from the automatic segregation of individuals identified as mentally retarded and/or developmentally disabled to a concerted effort to bring them into the mainstream of community life.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act has stimulated improved educational services for many children with handicaps and affords the right to a free, appropriate, public education for these children, including those in out-of-home care. By the time they leave school, they will have participated in a variety of programs designed to meet their academic, vocational, and supportive service needs. However, upon completion of their public schooling, many youth with handicaps still need additional assistance to obtain training, gain employment, and live productive, self-sufficient adult lives.

At the present time, large numbers of individuals receiving the benefits of P.L. 99-457 are about to leave the security of their educational programs to confront the new expectations and demands of adult life. In 1983, Congress authorized a new federal initiative for secondary and transitional services to youth with handicaps, focusing on the development of model demonstration programs that would facilitate the transition of youth from school to life as an adult.

The quality of this life and the extent to which these youth achieve the desired goals of employment, community living, and social and leisure opportunities depend on the effectiveness of cooperative service planning and the availability of needed adult services. Deficiencies in service availability and service planning for youth with handicaps have been well documented in recent studies on postschool employment outcomes, residential living, social and leisure opportunities, and transportation.

Diverse Services Required

The basic objective during the transition period is to arrange those services needed to support successful adult living. Youth with disabilities, especially those with more severe handicaps, often require services from several different agencies, since their diverse needs cannot be met by one agency or private provider. Depending on the type and severity of disability, a young adult may require a variety of services: medical, psychological, vocational, life-skills development, housing placement, sexuality counseling, language skills, etc. Services that have addressed health and psychosocial concerns during childhood often are no longer focused appropriately as youths reach late adolescence.

A clear implication then for today's youth is that their preparation for the future will require thoughtful individual planning and the conscious allocation of resources in order to make the transition to independent living. Our current human service delivery system is composed of several separate systems, each the result of a categorical response to service needs. None of these single subsystems of education, health, welfare, rehabilitation, and housing can solve the multiple problems of persons with handicaps. Cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among these subsystems are necessary to achieve this.

The National Resource Institute on Children and Youth with Handicaps (NRICH) provides consultation, technical assistance, and training for developing independent living initiatives and programs relevant for youth with developmental and medical disabilities.

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The National Resource Institute on Children and Youth with Handicaps (NRICH) provides training and resources for professionals who work with children and youth with disabilities and who are being served by the child welfare system. For more information, contact NRICH, Child Development and Mental Retardation Center, University of Washington, Mail Stop WJ-10, Seattle, WA 98195; (206) 543-2254.

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