

Work Experience:

A Model of Implementation For Students with Special Needs

*Developed by
Manitoba Supported Employment Network*



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The goal of this manual is to develop guidelines that will help the teachers and parents of students with special needs better prepare their children for transition into the workforce for other community integration.

History

For some time Supported Employment Agencies (as expressed at Manitoba Supported Employment Network meetings) have found that students with special needs who are graduating from the school require more specific planning for transition into the workforce or community.

As such, two major areas of need have been identified:

- That students and parents develop realistic expectations as to what jobs are available in the community; the skills and qualifications necessary to do the jobs, and the wages they can expect to receive as remuneration
- That students require school programs which support the development of generic and job specific work skills.

In an attempt to address these issues some agencies have developed close working relationships with various high schools but, although efforts have been made in the past, it has been difficult to coordinate our combined efforts. Personnel within the schools and agencies change regularly, and it has been challenging trying to find the proper vehicle within Education, Citizenship & Youth to help us disseminate information.

The guidelines suggested in this paper were developed through the collaboration of one Winnipeg agency and one area High School. Another Winnipeg Agency was asked to share their expertise and input in developing the final product.

It should be noted that we are suggesting these guidelines be considered common sense suggestions; certainly not policy. They are intended to be a resource to schools and parents. We recognize the efforts of area schools and understand that resources are often limited. Each school's ability to respond to these guidelines will be different. Our only request is that you examine the contained information and adapt any portion you

feel may help with your students transitional needs. Of course, any type of planning should be adapted and modifies to help meet the individual needs of the student.

Any information given in the following guidelines is based on the assumptions that:

- Students with special needs have been identified by the age of sixteen as agreed to by the Dept. of Education and Training and the Dept. of Family Services and Housing.
- Any planning for work Experience should incorporate and respect the choices and decisions the students and their parents and/or advocates.
- That the expectations placed on the students (over a three to five year period) be progressive, and culminate with full workforce, or at least community integration as the goal.

This model has been designed to be implemented over a three year period but could easily be adapted to five years. For each year the guidelines have been laid out with respect to Goals, the type of Work Experience Recommended, the Duration of the Work Experience, and the Support and Communication Required. Notes are attached which schools may find useful to incorporate in their planning.

Work Experience Design
Continued Progression towards Employability
Year One

Goals

- Students will be given the opportunity to participate in short term job experiences.
- Students will begin to develop positive work habits and social skills conducive to being a positive and effective employee
- Students will begin to develop areas of interest regarding employment and future job placement
- Students will begin to learn to use public transportation
- Students will be encouraged to learn to motivate themselves to do their best, and be given a clear understanding of what an employer can expect from them

Type of Work Experience

- Community based supportive employment site
- Focus of learning to be on generic work skills and skills which are transferable to subsequent sites
- Focus to be on simple task acquisition, not necessarily on production
- Attention to be given to issues centering around punctuality, appearance, responsibility, communication, manners and politeness

Duration of Experience

- Short term
- 2-3 weeks maximum
- Half days possibly to start
- 2-3 different placements over the period of a semester

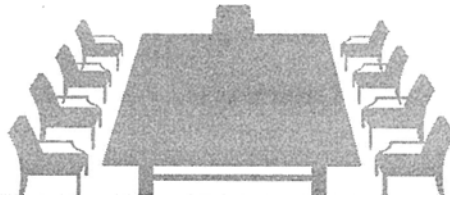
Support and Communication (Role of School)

- Communicate goals to employer
- Staff initially provides support for the half day or as required
- Staff serves as role of intermediary, providing a role model for both the employer and student and fostering natural supports
- Staff uses the least intrusive model (*1) of support but are there when necessary to help the student before they develop as pattern of mistakes

- Staff develops and discusses the goals of the Work Experience with the students and their parents and provides them with regular feedback
- Staff reviews the Work Experience after its conclusion, share information with the students and parents and encourage their support in helping to plan for the next placement

Support and Communication (Role of the Employer)

- To be aware of the Work Experience Goal
- To communicate directly with the student regarding directions and feedback
- To review the experience with the student and school staff after its completion, with the purpose of giving accurate information which may influence future planning



Work Experience Design
Continued Progression towards Employability
Year Two

Goals

- Students will be given the opportunity to participate in a number of short term job experiences
- Students will practice positive work habits and social skills conducive to being a positive and effective employee
- Students will be able to increase their areas of responsibility and improve production while beginning to learn some industry specific skills
- Students will further refine their areas of interest regarding employment and future job placement
- Students will become more confident and independent in using public transportation
- Students will be further encouraged to motivate themselves and have a greater understanding of the consequences of having poor work habits with regard to employment

Type of Work Experience

- Community based supported employment site
- Continued focus on general and transferable skills
- More expectation regarding work production
- More complex tasks will be taught so the student experiences more of what a “real job” feels like.

Duration of Experience

- Short term
- 2-6 weeks
- Half to full day placements
- 3-6 different placements over the course of one or both school semesters

Support and Communication (Role of School)

- Communicates goals to employer
- Staff initially supports staff for the full day and fades out accordingly

- Staff serves as role model for both employer and student and fosters natural supports where possible
- Staff to provide training using a variety of techniques and with the goal of making the student independent as soon as possible
- Staff to continue to communicate goals and outcomes of the Work Experience to students and parents.
- Staff reviews the Work Experience after its conclusion, sharing this information with the student and their parents and together redefining the goals for the next Work Experience

Support and Communication (Role of employer)

- To be aware of the Work Experience goal
- To communicate directly with the student - direction and feedback
- To review the experience with the student and school staff after its completion sharing other accurate information and indicating to the student any areas which may need improvement should they want to be employed in that field.



Work Experience Design;
Continued Progression towards Employability

Year Three

Goals

- Students will be given the opportunity to participate in long term Work Experience
- Students will demonstrate positive work habits and social skills which will be transferable to any employment situation
- Students will have gathered enough information and experience to be able to narrow their focus of interest regarding employment and future job opportunities
- Students and parents (having been part of the planning process) will have an understanding of vocational options and what vocational services may be available after graduation
- Students will be confident and able to take public transportation independently
- Students will be motivated to work, having an understanding of what will be expected of them in a “real” job

Type of Work Experience

- Community and/or city based supportive employment site
- Greater expectation regarding productivity, accuracy
- Refinement of skills involving more complex tasks
- Continued focus and refinement of generic work skills: punctuality, responsibility, communication, politeness, etc.

Duration of Experience

- Long term
- 2-3 months full days
- Full Day Placement
- Placements for one or both school semesters
- At start of 2nd semester possibly begin transition to agency-if one has been identified by Vocational Rehabilitation or Community Living and agreed upon by the student

Support and Communication (Role of School)

- As in Year 2
- Possibility of asking employers to turn Work Experience into paid employment (where appropriate)
- Development of a portfolio detailing student's work experiences, learning styles, etc. which can be passed on to a community agency with recommendations of how to best work with the student
- Transition meeting with identified agency and Family Services Caseworker

Support and Communication (Role of Employer)

- Aware of Work Experience goal
- Communicates directly to students – directions, feedback
- To challenge students to be the best of their abilities (this is the last chance to see if students are work ready and provide any necessary counseling)
- Participates in evaluating student's likelihood to succeed working in that particular industry, possibly giving a reference and listing other contacts



Additional Information

Least Intrusive Model of Support (*1)

This model of support promotes independence. Over dependence on the teacher (instructor) can lead to a breakdown when they withdraw from the site.

The employer (or supervisor) is asked to provide instruction and directions to the student as they would to any other employee. Only when a mistake is about to be made does the instructor intercede to provide guidance and direction. At this point they will use the minimum prompt necessary to see the job is well done.

A typical hierarchy of training prompts could look as follows:

- Least to Most Intrusive:**
- Physical Gesture such as a nod of the head
 - Verbal gesture or reminder
 - Complete verbal instructions
 - Modeling the steps to the student
 - Physically manipulating the student through the procedure

This type of training recognizes that at times it may be necessary to provide very intensive task analysis training while others simple guidance from the employer will do. The goal of the instructor is to ensure the job is done properly while not upsetting the culture of the workplace and attracting as little unusual attention to the student as possible.

Some other general training tips we might suggest are:

- That existing supports natural to the work environment are utilized as much as possible
- Training will result in better outcomes when it's offered proactively, rather than a reaction to crisis situations
- Artificial training or unusual processes used to change behaviour are minimized
- Teaching techniques which may convey poor images, stigma, or devalued status are not used
- At all times the business culture is respected and integrated into the person's support network
- No one trainer, technique, or approach is the one right answer. A good instructor has the obligation to bring in a diversity of approaches from the field. The larger the bag of tricks, the better the instructor
- The best training is an empowerment of individuals and employers to become competent to provide their own ongoing training

Selection of Work Experience (Employers)

Many area schools have a bank of Work Experience sites which they rotate students through to give them a variety of experiences. While there is not necessarily anything wrong with this and it certainly is efficient, it is not likely the appropriate choice for all students.

In the early years, many students will have no idea of the type of work they would like to do, and in the absence of any interests they can benefit learning generic work skills in almost any setting. If they have preferences however, these choices should be respected and a suitable employer should be sought to help them learn skills in the environment of their choice. After all, it is unlikely a student will put forth much effort in a work situation they have no interest in, or even dislike.

The development of different sites is even more important as the student nears graduation and may have declared a specific interest in one or two occupations. In this case, special emphasis should be placed on selecting a site where the students can best hone their skills.

Employers should be aware of the goals of each particular work experience, and should be encouraged to challenge students to achieve to the best of their abilities.

Sites should be chosen selectively with employers who are supportive and understand that they will play an active, rather than passive role. They should be willing to participate in supervision and agree to spend some time reviewing the student's progress at the Work Experience's conclusion. Whenever possible, and if the student is able, job descriptions should mimic real jobs in the community. Staff should encourage employees to provide accurate information so that training issues can be addressed and proper planning done.

Always remember that the goal of any Work Experience Program should be a continued progression towards employability. At the conclusion of each placement school staff should ask if they are closer to this goal than when they started.

Parent/Family/Or Advocate Involvement

Parental (family or advocate) involvement in the planning of the student's Work Experience is critical. Parents need to be actively involved in educating themselves on the opportunities that are likely to exist for their children after graduation. If their goal is to see their children move on to further education, they should be encouraged to explore these possibilities themselves; to find out what entry level requirements are necessary for admission to courses, and to determine what is realistic and what is not.

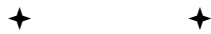
Parents also need to be aware of the different programs which exist in the adult system. Many parents are unaware that even though their child is determined to be eligible to receive services, this is not in fact a guarantee that the requested services will be available after graduation. Waiting lists exist for some community programs and also for education. Staff from Family Services should define their role in this matter, as well as explaining a range of community options. Many times community agencies will make themselves available to explain the types of services they can provide.

Above all, parents should know that by placing high but realistic expectations on their children themselves, this will help better prepare them for the transition into the work world. Employers will not be expected to make allowances for poor performance or a bad attitude, and community agencies can only be expected to work with people who are putting forth some effort on their own behalf.



We hope that this guide has been of service in helping to plan valuable experiences for students in the difficult transition from school to work.

We encourage you to share this manual with students and their parents or advocates.



If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the following contributors to this resource:

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