



Television Documentary Series on Preparing for Adulthood

CWIB Special Project: Northern Rural Training and Employment Consortium (NoRTEC)

Elements: Youth Development and Support, Youth Leadership

Function: Promoting Policies to Sustain Effective Practices

Subject: Serving Special Populations, Youth Involvement, Innovative Programs

The Challenge: High school students in the northern part of the state struggle to develop career goals and plan their future. A survey of 1500 high school seniors revealed that 90 percent of youth said they had a vision for their future. However, when asked what they had done to act on this vision, only 45 percent had taken concrete steps to put the plan into action. Survey results show that more than 50 percent of youth in Shasta, Tehama, and Trinity Counties did not have a plan as of May in their senior year of high school as they moved towards graduation. The survey results for youth with disabilities were consistent with the identified norm. Youth indicated parents and adults who had gained the respect of the youth significantly influence their plans for their future. NORTEC, a consortium of nine north California counties, has never had a formal Youth Council. However, the CWIB-funded Futures Project, funded by an Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities Project (ITOP) grant in the north state, wanted to provide a forum through which parents and the community as a whole could hear what was missing. It was agreed that it is important for adults who influence youth to hear the message and be given information and resources to help them support youth in developing a plan – knowing what they want to do, what their options are, and how to get there.

The Practices and Evidence: It was decided to use television as one of the tools to promote the message. A meeting was scheduled with the producers at Redding's local Public Broadcast System (PBS) station. The Futures Project staff shared the problem, survey results, and information from the ITOP grant, which included frameworks for youth with disabilities, with producers from the PBS station. The producers were excited about the project and saw this as a way to address an unmet community need. If parents and youth could become engaged and learn what career opportunities and supports were available and how to access them, success would be achieved on all fronts. (To access the survey, go to www.shastacareerconnections.org.)

Details: The Futures Project is funded by the CWIB through an ITOP grant, one of three pilot initiatives in the state.

The documentaries were produced in cooperation with the local PBS television station. As a result of conversations with Lorraine Dechter, Producer/Director, two television shows were produced, titled "The Futures Shows." The goal of each program was to promote a strong message to parents and adults in the community about how important they were in preparing youth for transitioning from high school to career.

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All involved agreed the best way to accomplish the goal was through youth voices.

Each show began with Sue Sawyer, Executive Director of Shasta 21st Century Career Connections, (a community-based intermediary organization with the Improving Transition Outcomes Project) providing the foundation for the program. The next segment focused on staff from the Smart Center speaking about how easy it is to work with an individual who has a sense of what they want to do, and knows what their skill sets are and how they can be incorporated into further education, work, and career. This piece was focused directly at parents and other caring adults who have the potential for a significant, positive impact on the lives of youth.

The film then segues into a ten-minute segment about two boys who have been friends for years. One youth is ADHD/learning handicapped and the other does not have learning challenges, yet both find themselves ill prepared to go forth into further education or the work world upon high school graduation. The audience witnesses the experience of these young men mentoring one another about how to set goals and move ahead as they begin to explore different businesses, visit the career center and an ROP program at their school, and read the local newspaper, all with the intent of learning about available life options.

The film closes with a variety of community businesspersons speaking about the importance of providing youth with the opportunities to explore their options. Business partners speak about what it means to be successful, to understand career ladders, to have a strong work ethic, and to know the importance of education. The program closes with the Redding City Manager urging the audience to build a critical mass of support for youth in identifying and developing life plans. He explains this can be accomplished when parents and community work together and focus on positive transitions for all youth.

The second program in the series focuses on youth speaking to youth. Each young person has a specific disability that impacts their life, yet each has developed internal tools to maneuver through some of life's challenges. They serve as mentors to one another. The youth identify life situations and share how they have dealt with them, and go into the deeper situations facing young people, especially if they are challenged learners. The key message of this film is the importance of seeking out caring adults to assist in sorting through and resolving life problems as they arise.

Now that the production is complete, the Futures Project is using the "youth to youth" piece as a stand alone. It is used in presentations to service organizations, classrooms, and various television stations. The film will also be used as a tool to teach decision-making skills in various curricula.

The film has been shared with the Shasta's 21st Century Career Connections. Sawyer, the Executive Director, says she wants it made available to schools as well as to Juvenile Probation, and any youth-serving organization in the county in order to promote student success. The ten-minute "voice of the youth" piece is the marketing "buy in" piece.

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Breakthrough Moment: The Futures Project Staff had been working on the project for quite a while and felt it important to test the films on a different audience and decided to share the films with the Shasta 21st Century Career Connections Board of Directors. The board is composed of a county administrator, a community college vice president, three business people, a director of a local intersegmental college partnership, and the director of career and technical education at a local high school district. The reaction to this film was “The message is solid and must be heard.” Youth audiences critiqued the film and said the message was strong, held their interest, and was something they could identify with. The film also received a positive reception from a local Rotary Club.

What’s Next for this YCidea? The Futures Project will share these films in every venue possible – schools, career centers, and community. The films are being used to promote the whole concept of helping youth set goals and make informed decisions based on career exploration activities. It is anticipated the number of options for internships available for youth will be increased through this effort.

Where to Go for More Information

Northern Rural Training and Employment Consortium

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