

Clark County Options Program Final Report



Partnerships for Youth Transition
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Clark County Department of Community Services
P.O. Box 5000
Vancouver, Washington 98668-5000

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Executive Summary

This report describes the achievements of a four year SAMHSA grant, Partnerships for Youth Transition, which resulted in the development and refinement of the Options Program. Options is a program that serves transition aged youth, (14 to 25 years old) who have a diagnosed mental health disability which impacts their functioning in school, home or community. All youth had received significant amounts of services through the children's mental health system and were likely to need services and supports as young adults.

The Options Program was housed at the Youth House, a community center for a variety of youth activities in Vancouver, Washington. The Options program was managed by Columbia River Mental Health Services under contract with the Clark County Department of Community Services. The program employed several transition specialists, an employment specialist, a youth coordinator as well as a part time program manager. At its' most active stage of implementation, four transition specialists served 60 youth at any given time. After a one year planning period, the program was funded with grant funds for three years. During that time, referrals for 128 youth were processed. About 20% of the youth referred did not connect with a transition specialist despite repeated attempts at outreach. Eighty-four (84) youth (66%) engaged with the program, receiving services for at least a month; 50% of these youth were still in the program a year later. The youth served tended to be 16 or 17 years old, male and white. Most of the youth had received public mental health services, special education services and were involved with the juvenile justice system due to an arrest. Many had been homeless or were at imminent risk of being homeless even though 66% were living with their parents when they entered the program.

Services used and outcomes were assessed on 51 youth at the point that they had been working with the Options program for at least 9 months. At the 9 month data collection point, youth had received, on average, 99 hours of face-to-face support. About 60% of the service hours were focused on community life skills and other case management activities. Approximately 26% of the services hours was dedicated to employment and the rest focused on education and housing. Overall, the youth were satisfied with the Options program and the work of the transition specialists, rating their overall satisfaction at 4.2 or higher on a 5 point scale with 5 being "very satisfied".

The impact of the program was assessed on four domains: living situation, educational status, employment status and criminal justice involvement. Housing remained fairly stable over the 9 months time period with fewer youth living at home at 9 months and more youth living with friends or independently. Numbers living in foster care, corrections or homeless remained unchanged. Involvement in educational programs remained high over the 9 month period with approximately 70% involved in either high school, GED or some other program. By the 9 month time point, 10 youth had either graduated from high school or received their GED. Employment status showed strong

positive improvement. Close to 40% of the youth had worked in some form in the past 90 days when asked at the 9 month data collection.

The most striking positive outcomes were seen in involvement with juvenile justice. At 9 months there was a significant decrease in the number of youth with at least one substantiated offense (from 61% pre intake to 29% during the 9 months post intake). There was also a significant reduction in the frequency of offenses, from an average of 1.6 offenses during the 9 months pre intake to an average of .7 offenses during the 9 months post intake.

Taken together, about 25% of the youth showed positive movement in all four domains measured and another 22% showed positive trends in three domains.

This group of youth has experienced high levels of service during their youth lives and have had many challenges to overcome as they move into adulthood. The combination of support in managing their mental health symptoms and developing skills of adult living, combined with strong employment support, was successful in stabilizing their living situation, improving employment outcomes and reducing involvement with the criminal justice system.

I. Description of the Options Program

Options is the program developed by residents of Clark County Washington in response to the Partnership for Youth Transition initiative introduced by the Child and Adolescent Branch of the Center for Mental Health Services within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the federal government. Under the leadership of staff from the Clark County Department of Community Services, funding was obtained and a planning year began in October 2002. The hiring and training of staff began a year later with service delivery beginning in January 2004. The grant funding ended in September 2006, however the Options program continues to be funded by a combination of Medicaid and State and County general funds.

Planning process

Over the past decade, Clark County has been building a system of care for children, youth and families that address the developmental tasks and challenges of transition age youth. This system is based upon the principles of Individualized and Tailored Care (ITC) and consumer involvement in planning, oversight and direct service delivery. At the time of planning the Options Program, Clark County was also involved in the latter stages of a multi-tier redesign of its children's mental health system funded in part by a SAMHSA Children's System of Care grant. This successful prior work clearly provided advantages such as linkages with important stakeholders, sharing of expertise and established collaborative relationships of trust amongst key groups.

The planning year for Options was guided by a multi-disciplinary community team referred to as the "steering committee". This group was not a governance board, but rather served as focus for identifying gaps in the existing system, developing strategies to fill those gaps and as a center for youth involvement. A range of tools were used by the steering committee. These included assessment of existing system data, conducting surveys and focus groups, and taking advantage of Social Network Analysis information from an externally funded study. Youth and family members were an integral part of the planning process. Both were trained to conduct focus groups of their peers and youth participated in analyzing and presenting the focus group data during the planning retreat. The university-based evaluation team participated in the monthly steering committee meetings and was an integral part of the planning process.

Program design

From the beginning, the program design was influenced by the use of logic modeling. The model developed for the grant proposal changed substantially over the years of the project. The most recent logic model is included at the end of this section. The Options practice model was originally based in four theoretical perspectives: 1) Transition to Independence Process (TIP), 2) Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT), 3) Supported Employment and 4) Core Gifts assessment. These four approaches and their

supporting evidence are described in the Options Program Manual. The emphasis on each of these perspectives shifted over the four years of the project. TIP and Supported Employment were key components of Options and remained so throughout the demonstration. A PACT approach, modified for older adults, was explored during the second year of the grant. Because of the expense, it wasn't possible to dedicate a full PACT team to transition age youth. Instead, a child and adolescent specialist was added to an existing adult oriented PACT team. This team served 7 youth during that year; most were youth who experienced mental health difficulties for the first time at age 16 or 17. At the end of the second year, the decision was made to support the PACT intervention through the established mental health system and focus grant resources on the transition specialists using TIP and supported employment.

Core Gifts is an intervention designed by Bruce Anderson at Community Activators and provided a way for staff to help youth identify personal strengths and gain positive insight into themselves at a critical juncture in their lives. Options staff received training from Dr. Anderson and during the second and third year of the grant, this approach was used fairly consistently with all youth. Evaluation data suggests that the intervention had varying impact, with some youth very engaged by the information and others less interested. There was some suggestion that the intervention might be more appropriate for older youth. During year four, as staff who had been trained left, this intervention was used less.

Eligibility criteria

The Options program was designed to meet the needs of youth and their families whose needs are greater than can be met by clinical interventions alone. The target population, identified in the grant proposal and continued throughout the four years, is as follows:

- 1) Transition age youth 14-25 years old.
- 2) Meet the criteria of DSM-IV diagnosis
- 3) In out-of-home placement or at risk of out-of-home placement
- 4) Voluntarily consent to participate

Family members of participating youth were involved at their and the youth's discretion.

Program staffing

The staffing for Options varied slightly over the four years. The major roles were a program manager, transition specialists, employment specialist and a youth coordinator. These roles and their source of funding are described in the Options Program Manual. At its peak, the program had four transition specialists, however, with turnover it sometimes ran with two or three. These individuals served as "developmentally appropriate" case managers and were key to engaging and retaining the youth in the program. Originally two individual were hired to focus on employment, a job developer and a pre-employment specialist. When this division became too confusing as expressed by youth in the program, the roles were merged into one employment specialist. A single

individual held the role of job developer and then employment specialist and this was a key role throughout the grant. The youth coordinator role was developed from youth input during the strategic planning process. This role was also held by a single individual over the four years and was key to coordinating youth empowerment and involvement in the management of the program.

II. Participant Characteristics

Numbers of youth served

The Options Program far exceeded its target of serving 60 youth over the life of the grant. As the narrative below demonstrates, Options served over 100 youth, 84 of whom were engaged in a significant way.

Data for Table 1 was obtained from an Excel database maintained by the Options program manager. This database was used to support the management of the Options program, especially to track how many youth were in each phase of engaging with the program. This database accounts for all youth referred to Options and thus does a better job of demonstrating the program's reach than does the data collected through the Efforts to Outcome (ETO) system. The ETO system was a database developed for the Partnership for Youth Transition Programs by ORC Macro. Data from this source are described in Tables 3-6.

Table 1 describes the activity of Options at one point in time, the end of July 2006. The key information in this table is in the far right column, "total referrals". The largest number of referrals, 71 or 55 %, were received from Connections, a program jointly developed and funded by the Clark County Regional Support Network (mental health) and the Clark County Department of Juvenile Justice. The Connections program served youth with mental health diagnosis who were also on probation. This program employed a wrap around model of services which ended when probation ended. Transitioning Connections youth into the Options program proved to be an effective way to make sure that youth continued to receive support as they developed the community living skills they needed. This referral pattern also accounts for the high level of juvenile justice involvement in the Options participants. Catholic Community Services, the agency in Clark County that provides intensive in-home wrap around services to families of children with serious emotional and behavioral disorders referred 28 or 22% of the youth to Options. These two organizations were the only ones allowed to refer to Options during its first year of operation (year two of the grant.) During year 3 of the grant, referrals were opened up to the entire community which resulted in referrals coming from other mental health agencies (including Columbia River Mental Health) and directly from families and youth themselves.

Referral Sources:

Table 1. Youth referred and referral source as of 7-31-06.

Referral Source	Referred but not engaged	Referred and attempting to engage	Currently active	Closed*	Total referrals
Catholic Community Services	8	0	4	16	28(22%)
Connections	7	1	16	47	71 (55%)
Other	10	0	9	10	29(23%)
Total	25 (20%)	1 (<1%)	29 (23%)	73 (57%)	128

*Closed category includes youth who moved out of the area and youth who left the program for other reasons.

Census

The number of youth active in Options at any point in town varied depending on both the stage of program development and the number of transition specialists available. Monthly census usually varied between 45 and 60 youth. At the height of the program (January through May 2006) four transition specialist were employed and each were responsible for at least 15 youth. During this time the active caseload was over 60 youth each month. At the end of July, 2006 (as depicted in Table 1) the census was unusually low because two of the four transition specialists had left the program and had not been replaced. In addition to this, policy changes implemented when the program moved from grant funding to Medicaid based funding motivated some youth to leave the program in June 06.

Length of Involvement

Over the course of 3 years, Options received referrals for 128 youth, 26 or 20% were offered services but did not engage with the program; an additional 18 youth engaged with services but did not remain long enough to complete the first set of ETO data. These youth probably had between 1 and 4 contacts with a transition specialist, taking place over a month or less. Eighty-four (66%) of the youth referred were enrolled to the extent that “historical/intake” data were recorded for them. The second half of Table 2 shows how many youth were retained in the evaluation after the first set of data (historical/intake) was collected. Of the 84 youth who completed the first data wave, 50% were still participating in Options a year later.

Table 2. Length of Involvement

	Number	Percent
Did not engage	26	20%
Engaged but did not complete historical/intake data	18	14%
Completed historical/intake data	84	66%
Total number referred*	128	100%
Data wave completed	Number	% retained
Completed 3 month data	72	86%
Completed 6 month data	63	75%
Completed 9 month data	51	61%
Completed 12 month data	41	49%
Completed 15 month data	32	38%

*For most of years 2-4 a waiting list was maintained of youth who were referred but for whom there was no space. These youth, sometimes as many as 30, are not reflected in this number.

Demographics

Data presented in Tables 3-6 were collected by transition specialists using a semi-structured interview protocol and recorded in the Effort to Outcome (ETO) data base developed for the Partnership for Youth Transition sites by ORC Macro. These data were then compiled by local evaluators. Transition specialists were asked to collect the first wave of data (referred to as historical/intake) within a month of beginning their work with a young person. Transition specialists could directly interview the youth in order to collect the data or could complete the data forms from recall. Youth for whom the first wave of data was collected were considered “enrolled” in the Options program.

Tables 3-6 also present a comparison between the 84 youth who were enrolled and the 51 youth who had been in the program for 9 months. This comparison helps the reader to assess whether the 51 youth for whom outcome data are available (see section V) are any different than the general population of youth served by Options.

As Table 3 demonstrates, the two groups are very similar in age, gender and ethnicity.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of youth enrolled (intake completed) and youth served 9 months or more.

	Youth enrolled (n=84)		Youth served for 9 months or more (n=51)	
	N	%	N	%
Age at intake				
14	6	7%	5	10%
15	11	13%	6	12%
16	28	33%	20	39%
17	26	31%	14	28%
18	7	8%	4	8%
19+	6	7%	2	4%
Gender				
Male	49	58%	30	59%
Female	35	42%	21	41%
Ethnicity				
Caucasian	77	92%	47	92%
Hispanic	3	4%	1	2%
African American	2	2%	1	2%
Native American	1	1%	1	2%
Bi-racial	1	1%	1	2%

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Youth experiences prior to Options

The data for Table 4 was collected as a part of the historical interview. This interview requested information about the youth's life and documented the amount of services and the potential trauma the youth had faced prior to entering Options. The data in Table 4 was used in constructing a composite variable reflective of the severity of the disability experienced by the youth. This composite is discussed further in Section V.

Both groups were highly likely (more than 60%) to have been involved in special education, public mental health services and "ever arrested" (juvenile justice involvement). The high number of "don't know" responses to the first two variables suggests that this may be a conservative estimate. The enrolled youth were slightly more likely to have had an alcohol or drug problem and to have been arrested.

Table 4. Youth life experiences (prior to Options)

	Youth enrolled (n=84)		Youth served for 9 months or more (n=51)	
	N	%	N	%
Ever experience homelessness	37	44%	22	43%
Ever experience psychiatric hospitalization	16	19%	8	16%
Ever experience psychiatric residential treatment	13	16%	5	10%
Ever involved in special education	52	62%*	34	67%
Ever involved in public mental health services	62	74%*	40	78%
Ever experienced substance abuse hospitalization	7	8%	5	10%
Ever admitted to substance abuse residential treatment program	18	21%	10	20%
Ever had alcohol or drug problem	40	48%	20	39%
Ever arrested	70	83%	38	75%

*More than 10% "don't know"

Environmental factors

Table 5 reviews both the living situation and the custody status for the youth enrolled and served by Options. Over 2/3 of both groups were still in the custody of their parents or of an extended family member at the time they started their work with Options although there were identified factors present that supported imminent risk of out of home placement for these youth. About 15% of each group was in the custody of the state, either through child welfare or juvenile justice. Few of the youth were considered an independent adult although 5 (6%) reported living independently. Three of the youth were living with a partner at intake and 4 youth had a child. None of these latter two groups of youth were found in the group that was served for nine months or more.

Most youth (55 or 66%) were living with their family at intake although many of these arrangements were fragile. A small number of youth reported being homeless. The pattern of residence between the enrolled and served youth was remarkably similar in most respects.

Table 5. Youth living and family situation at enrollment

	Youth enrolled (n=84)		Youth served for 9 months or more (n=51)	
	N	%	N	%
Custody status				
Minor in custody of parents or extended family	55	66%	36	71%
Adult with a guardian	5	6%	2	4%
Independent adult	9	11%	3	6%
Minor in custody of child welfare or Juvenile justice	13	15%	8	16%
Other	2	2%	2	4%
Residence at intake				
With family	55	66%	31	61%
Friend's home (temporary)	3	4%	3	6%
Corrections	5	6%	3	6%
Don't know	4	6%	4	8%
Homeless	3	4%	3	6%
Regular foster care	5	6%	2	4%
Residential psychiatric treatment	1	1%	0	0%
With extended family	4	5%	4	8%
With roommates/friends	3	4%	1	2%

Employment and Education

Table 6 indicates that around 70% of each group was enrolled in high school or a GED program when they became involved with Options. About 10% had already graduated high school or received a GED. A very small number (3 youth) were involved in post secondary education at the time of intake. Very few youth (8%) were employed in any way at the time of intake. About 40% had work in some capacity in the past three months. There are only minor differences between the 84 youth who enrolled in Options and the 51 youth who remained in the program past 9 months.

Table 6. Youth education and employment status at enrollment

	Youth enrolled (n=84)		Youth served for 9 months or more (n=51)	
	N	%	N	%
Education status				
Enrolled in high school or GED	57	68%	36	71%
Enrolled in post secondary	3	3%	2	4%
Completed GED	5	6%	4	8%
Graduated high school	3	4%	1	2%
Expelled or suspended	2	2%	1	2%
Dropped out of high school	8	10%	4	8%
Other	6	7%	3	6%
Employment status				
Employed at intake	7	8%	4	8%
Not employed at intake	77	92%	47	92%
Work in some form within last 90 days	33	39%	19	37%
No work in last 90 days	51	61%	32	63%

III. Services Delivered Through the Options Program

This section of the report focuses on the amount of services delivered to youth involved in the program (Tables 7-9) and youth’s opinions about the usefulness of those services (Tables 10-11). These data came from two sources. Data in Tables 7 & 8 were abstracted from the county’s automated database. This system is used to record services for billing purposes. It is important to note that only face-to-face contacts are accounted for in the County’s automated database. The second set of data came from a more complex service activity reporting system maintained by the Options program. This system required transition specialists and the employment specialist to report all activity on behalf of each youth they were working with. In this data set, telephone contacts, contact with family members and other collaterals, as well as face-to-face contacts with

the youth were recorded in 15-minute intervals. Although this system never accounted for all of the employment and transition specialists time, it does give a glimpse into this broader set of activities.

Table 7 reviews the total number of hours reported to the CSM billing system for the 51 youth who remained with Options for at least 9 months. A small number of youth (8 or 16%) received between 15 and 36 billed hours of services. In a nine-month period, this would amount to about 1 hour a week of contact. At the other end of the spectrum, 14 youth (27%) received between 145 and 246 face-to-face hours during their contact with Options. If these youth were in the program for 9 months, this would have averaged to about 6 hours a week of face-to-face contact. Thirty-seven (37) of the 51 youth were still in the program at 15 months, it is likely that these 14 youth were in that group. Even at 15 months, these youth would be receiving, on average, 4 hours a week of face-to-face time. On average, the 51 youth received 98.7 hours of contact while in the program. When viewed over a 9 month time period, this suggests an average of 2.7 hours of contact per week. It is likely that the billing system underestimates the actual amount of time a youth spent with a staff member.

Table 7. Hours of face-to-face services billed through CSM for 51 youth who received 9 months or more of service

Number of hours	Total hours	Number of youth	Average hours
15-36 hrs	189.1	8 (16%)	23.6
37-72	776.5	15 (29%)	51.8
73-108	857.3	9 (18%)	86.3
109-144	607	5 (10%)	121.4
145-246	2604.3	14 (27%)	186
	5034.2	51	98.7

The County’s data system also allowed us to assess contact time in three specific categories - employment supports, education supports and housing supports. These data are reflected in Table 8. For both education (70%) and housing (78%), the majority of youth received fewer than 10 hours of services. For both, about 25% of the youth had no services in this category. Since many youth were living at home, services of the transition specialists may have helped to stabilize that situation and avoid out of home placement, thus making housing support unnecessary. In both of these categories, a short episode of problem solving may have “fixed” the situation and was not needed again. The hours billed for employment exhibits a much broader set of patterns. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of the youth required less than 10 hours of employment support. This group of youth may have been in the younger age range (14 or 15) making employment

or even pre-employment activities less a focus of their success plan. Seventy-three (73%) of the youth received more than 11 hours of billable employment support, suggesting that employment services may have been one of the most sought after services, as well as the one that took the most face-to-face time.

Table 8. Frequency of face-to-face services billed for employment, education and housing supports for 51 youth who received 9 months or more of service.

Number of hours	Employment	Education	Housing
None	1 (2%)	14 (27%)	13 (25%)
1-10 hours	13 (25%)	22 (43%)	27 (53%)
11-20 hours	14 (27%)	13 (25%)	9 (18%)
21-30 hours	9 (18%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
31-40 hours	2 (4%)		
41-50 hours	4 (8%)		
51-60 hours	3 (6%)		
61+ hours	5 (10%)	1 (2%)	
Total hours	1329.6	344.2	273.5
Average hours	26.6	6.9	5.47
# of youth	51	51	51

The data in Table 9 presents a parallel picture of the services provided by the transition specialists. Twenty-six (26%) of the billable hours were focused on employment and table 9 suggests that about 29% of all hours were in this category. Seven (7%) of the billable hours were devoted to education support and an average of 7% of the hours in Table 9 were also reported for education. There is a small difference between the billable hours reported for housing support (5%) and the hours reported in Table 9 (7%). The similarities between the two data sources for these three categories suggests that these estimates are stable and can be used for estimating around 40% of transition specialists time.

The other two categories captured in Table 9, core services and community life adjustment, were not coded separately in the CSM system and so no comparison can be made. These two categories probably best represent the other 60% of transition specialist's time.

Core support hours include those activities that begin to initiate involvement in the Options program. The services and supports included in this category primarily involve assessments and intakes, team meetings and staffings, wraparound meetings, and initial engagement activities. Community life adjustment skills are those skills that address a young person's ability to live and function effectively in his/her desired neighborhood. These skills are generally obtained through independent living activities and services that may include advocacy, service coordination, system navigation, mentoring, teaching of skills, and obtaining, maintaining or developing community resources.

Table 9. Hours of services reported through Options data system (includes both face-to-face and telephone contact as well as contact with individual other than the youth) for all youth served.

Month	Core support		Education support		Housing support		Employment support		Community Life Adjustment	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Nov-04	72	16	20	4	1	.2	49	10	324	71
Dec-04	78	35	8	4	3	1	52	23	82	37
Jan-05	28	10	18	7	57	22	69	26	94	35
Feb-05	55	21	13	5	34	13	73	28	84	32
Mar-05	77	28	26	10	6	2	60	22	104	38
Apr-05	26	13	16	8	4	2	79	40	76	38
May-05	34	15	11	5	4	2	84	36	98	43
Jun-05	27	10	15	6	16	6	92	34	123	45
Jul-05	29	16	6	4	2	1	59	33	81	46
Aug-05	39	14	17	6	10	3	83	29	134	47
Sep-05	16	8	33	18	8	4	60	32	70	38
Oct-05	64	22	22	8	18	6	79	27	107	37
Month	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Nov-05	45	13	29	8	21	6	104	30	152	43
Dec-05	42	15	18	7	17	6	69	25	128	47
Jan-06	70	19	23	6	40	11	109	30	123	34
Feb-06	33	12	19	8	24	8	120	42	91	32
Mar-06	57	18	22	7	27	8	72	23	141	44
Apr-06	42	15	18	6	13	5	89	31	125	44
May-06	35	13	25	9	41	15	101	36	77	28
Jun-06	47	16	26	9	28	10	82	29	105	37
Average %		16%		7%		7%		29%		41%

Youth Satisfaction with the Options Program

The data in the remainder of this section comes from a series of brief telephone interviews conducted with youth at three-month intervals. These interviews were conducted by a youth evaluator, an individual who was also a participant in Options. Telephone contact was not always easy to make because youth changed phone numbers, moved around and were generally difficult to locate. The data presented below represents a small sub-sample of the youth who participated in Options. Youth were asked to describe their satisfaction with a number of aspects of the Options program. They responded on a five point scale from 1, very dissatisfied to 5, very satisfied.

Table 10. Mean responses to Youth Satisfaction Questionnaire (5 point scale)

Time frame	Overall satisfaction	Satisfaction with respect for beliefs	Satisfaction with understanding of culture	Satisfaction with ability to find services that work well	Satisfaction with level of involvement in planning	Satisfaction with number of times asked to meetings	Satisfaction with progress	How helpful was PYT
3 months N~37	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.1	4.3	3.8	4.1
6 months N~16	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.8	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.6
9 months N~19	4.3	4.8	4.7	4.5	4.3	4.3	4.0	4.3
12 months N~9	4.3	4.9	4.5	4.4	4.7	4.4	4.4	4.9
15 months N~9	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.6	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.7

Table 11 provides a more detailed look at the frequency distribution for the variable measuring overall satisfaction with Options. Higher than 80% of the youth responded either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” to this question at each time point. Although consumer satisfaction questions routinely garner highly positive responses, these indicate that the youth found the services provided by Options acceptable to their needs and tastes.

Table 11. Frequency of responses regarding overall satisfaction with Options.

Timeframe	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
3 months N~37	0	2 (5.4%)	5 (13.5%)	15 (40.5%)	15 (40.5%)
6 months N~16	0	0	2 (12.5%)	6 (37.5%)	8 (50%)
9 months N~19	0	2 (10.5%)	0	8 (42.1%)	9 (47.4%)
12 months N~9	0	0	1 (11.1%)	4 (44.4%)	4 (44.4%)
15 months N~9	0	0	0	2 (22.2%)	7 (77.8%)

Youths' Comments on Most and Least Helpful Things about the Options Program

The evaluation's youth satisfaction instrument included questions that invited young people to comment on the most and least helpful aspects of the Options Program. Comments were generally brief, and were usually paraphrased by the youth evaluator, rather than being recorded verbatim. Nonetheless, interesting themes emerged in both positive and negative domains, and offer insight into youths' frequently high, but sometimes low, quantitative satisfaction ratings.

In response to the "most helpful thing" question, youths' comments fell into the following categories, in descending order of frequency.

- *Emotional support*, including simply listening, provided by Options staff; examples included:
 - "They listen to me. They give me a place to go when I'm having a hard time."
 - "They are always there to help me."
- *Employment-related help*, whether in developing employment readiness skills or in job placement:
 - "Helping me with a resume."
 - "They helped me get the job that I have wanted for a long time."
- *Material support*, ranging from diapers, to assistance with transportation, to small financial incentives:
 - "...my Transition Specialist took me shopping for some baby things."
 - "Getting the bus passes."
 - "Getting the \$25 gift cards for going to the advisory meetings."
- *Independent living skills*:
 - "They've helped me as far as budgeting..."
 - "[Transition Specialist] has helped me with getting my license and insurance..."
- *Self discovery*:
 - "Helped me figure out what things I'm good at."
- Other comments, made by one or two individuals, which related to help with *education, housing, community involvement, and physical health*.

"Most helpful" comments were largely similar across administrations of the YSQ (as noted above, youth were contacted roughly every three months), although by the third opportunity two comments (out of 18 received) stating that "nothing was helpful" surfaced.

"Least helpful" comments fell into fewer categories; the most frequently cited was "Nothing" [was least helpful]. Other themes included:

- *Inadequate availability* of Transition Specialists:
 - "It's hard to get a hold of them, they are always busy, so you only get like, 15 minutes, which isn't very helpful."
 - "Just keeping in touch."

- *Lack of success in employment:*
 - “Not getting a job yet.”
 - “I wish I could find a job faster.”
- *Need for more youth direction, and lack of youth responsibility in the program:*
 - “I think that we...should meet as a group so that we can discuss how we can better improve the program.”
 - “People [other youth] not following through with stuff.”
- *Staff turnover:*
 - “For the last two months I haven’t really been involved because [Transition Specialist] is leaving.”

Other unique comments spoke to concerns about *program sustainability*, dissatisfaction with specific *group activities*, and discomfort with “*those kind of people...crazy people*” involved in the program.

Fidelity to the Program Models

Assessing fidelity is the process of monitoring whether the program has been implemented as planned and has stayed true to the critical elements of the program model. The six TIP principles and related practice guidelines for transition planning, the Core Gifts process and collaboration with existing Wraparound teams incorporated into the fidelity assessment as the primary program elements.

The fidelity assessment of the Options program employed a modified version of the TIP Case Study Protocol developed by Dr. Hewitt (Rusty) Clark and colleagues at the University of South Florida. This is an established protocol, which calls for a series of interviews with key stakeholders in the community as well as in depth analysis of a randomly selected group of youth. For the fidelity assessment in Clark County, a simplified version of the TIP Case Study Protocol was augmented with questions that assess other components of the program model, specifically the Core Gifts process and collaboration with Wraparound teams. The case records for each youth were reviewed using a structured document review protocol. Each youth was interviewed followed by an interview with the youth’s transition specialist.

The two senior members of the evaluation team conducted all interviews and chart reviews. That data was summarized in a four-page table so that staff could review the ratings and qualitative comments for each of the six TIP principles. This table was accompanied by a table that described the demographic characteristics of the eight youth and their responses to some fixed response ratings of various aspects of the Options program. The summarized data were reviewed first with the Options program manager and supervisor and then with the whole staff. Based on discussion with staff, some additional explanation and modification of qualitative data were made. The full report, as provided to the staff, is available on the evaluation teams’ web site (www.rrj.pdx.edu/CCTransitions/CCTranreports.htm).

IV. Program Outcomes

The data on outcomes contained in this section come from two sources. Tables 12-16 present data collected through the ETO system. Table 17 and 18 reports on data obtained from the Juvenile Justice information system in Clark County. All data are reported on the 51 youth who participated in the Option program for nine months or more.

As Table 12 indicates, living situation for these youth remained relatively stable over the nine months. There was a slight decrease in the number of youth living with their families and a slight increase in the number of youth living with roommates. These shifts are consistent with what might be expected of any youth this age.

Table 12. Change over time in living situation (n=51)

<i>Current Living Situation</i>	<i>Intake</i>	<i>3 months</i>	<i>6 months</i>	<i>9 months</i>
With family	35 (69%)	34 (67%)	27 (53%)	28 (55%)
With friends/roommates/alone	4 (8%)	4 (8%)	9 (18%)	8 (16%)
Foster care/group home	2 (4%)	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	3 (6%)
Corrections	3 (6%)	6 (12%)	8 (16%)	5 (10%)
Substance /psychiatric treatment	0	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)
Homeless	3 (6%)	0	1 (2%)	4 (8%)
Other	4 (8%)	1 (2%)	0	1 (2%)

Table 13 shows a decrease in the number of youth enrolled in high school or GED program. This is offset by an increase in the number of youth who have either graduated from high school or who report having received a GED. An increasing number of youth are thought to have “permanently” dropped out of school. Earlier analysis suggests that youth move in and out of the “permanently dropped out” status, calling the term into question. It is likely that the youth who reported having dropped out at the point of intake are different individuals than the youth who reported having dropped out at 9 months. In the aggregate, there are no major positive or negative changes in educational status over the nine months.

Table 13. Change in educational status over time (n=51)

<i>Current Educational Status</i>	<i>Intake</i>	<i>3 months</i>	<i>6 months</i>	<i>9 months</i>
Enrolled in				
Enrolled in High school	23 (47%)	26 (51%)	23 (45%)	16 (31%)
Enrolled in GED program	11 (22%)	8 (16%)	10 (20%)	6(12%)
Enrolled in community college	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	1(2%)	2(4%)
Enrolled in other program	4 (8%)	4(8%)	1 (2%)	7 (14%)
Not Enrolled-positive				
Graduated High School	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	3 (6%)	6 (12%)
Completed High School Certificate of completion	0	0	0	1(2%)
Completed GED	4(8%)	7 (14%)	3 (6%)	3 (6%)
Not enrolled-negative				
Permanently dropped out	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	7 (14%)	6 (12%)
Expelled from High School	0	0	0	2 (4%)
Suspended	1 (2%)	0	0	0
Other/Unknown	1 (2%)	0	3 (6%)	4 (8%)
Involved in special education in past 90 days (n=49)	27 (55%)	16 (33%)	10 (20%)	11 (22%)

The number of youth employed at the time of each data collection point changes substantially from intake (8%) to three months (26%). The rate of current employment remains stable at subsequent data points. The rate of youth who had worked at some point during the past 90 days did not change over the nine-month period. However, there was substantial increase in the number of youth who worked in paid competitive employment (from 8% to 20%). There was a similar increase in the percent of youth who realized income from a job (from 12% to 31%).

[proceed to next page]

Table 14. Change in employment status and source of income over time (n=51)

<i>Employment Status</i>	<i>Intake</i>	<i>3 months</i>	<i>6 months</i>	<i>9 months</i>
Currently employed	4 (8%)	13 (26%)	12 (24%)	14 (28%)
Within the past 90 days				
Worked in some form	19 (39%)	24 (47%)	26 (51%)	20 (39%)
Worked in paid competitive employment	4 (8%)	12 (24%)	13 (26%)	10 (20%)
Worked in informal employment	6 (12%)	10 (20%)	12 (24%)	9 (18%)
Performed volunteer work	12 (24%)	13 (26%)	17 (33%)	12 (24%)
Work or job was a source of income	6 (12%)	14 (28%)	19 (37%)	16 (31%)
Welfare was a source of income	6 (12%)	3 (6%)	9 (18%)	10 (20%)

The ETO system also collected data about criminal justice system involvement. As Table 15 reports, the number of youth arrested in the past 90 days went from 45% at intake to 29% at nine months. Similar reductions were seen in the number of youth incarcerated during the previous 90 days (48% to 24%). A slight increase is seen in the number of youth involved in adult corrections, probably related to the increasing age of the youth.

Table 15. Criminal justice system involvement over time (n=51).

(From ETO data system)

<i>During the previous 90 days</i>	<i>Intake</i>	<i>3 months</i>	<i>6 months</i>	<i>9 months</i>
Arrested	22 (45%)	10 (20%)	11 (22%)	14 (29%)
Incarcerated	23 (48%)	18 (37%)	15 (31%)	12 (24%)
Involved in adult correction	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	3 (6%)	4 (8%)

Table 16 summarizes the outcomes for each youth by four domains; employment, education, housing and criminal justice. The trajectory for each youth was assessed in each domain and given a rating of positive, mixed or negative. For example, a positive trajectory in employment would show the youth moving from no employment at intake to working part or full time at 9 months. The three different ratings are shown as three variations in gray shading. For example, the first 12 youth were assessed as making positive movement from intake to 9 months. The summary table at the bottom of Table 16 gives this breakdown. Twenty-four (24%) of the youth showed positive trends in all four domains and 22% showed positive trends in three domains. At the other end of the spectrum, 4% of the youth were either negative or mixed in all three domains.

Table 16. Trend in youth progress from intake to 9 months (n=51)

Youth #	employment	education	housing	criminal justice	# positive trends
1	green	green	green	green	4
2	green	green	green	green	4
3	green	green	green	green	4
4	green	green	green	green	4
5	green	green	green	green	4
6	green	green	green	green	4
7	green	green	green	green	4
8	green	green	green	green	4
9	green	green	green	green	4
10	green	green	green	green	4
11	green	green	green	green	4
12	green	green	green	green	4
13	green	red	green	green	3
14	red	green	green	green	3
15	green	green	yellow	green	3
16	yellow	green	green	green	3
17	green	green	green	yellow	3
18	yellow	green	green	green	3
19	green	green	yellow	green	3
20	yellow	green	green	green	3
21	green	green	green	green	3
22	yellow	green	green	green	3
23	red	green	green	green	3
24	green	green	red	red	2
25	yellow	green	yellow	green	2
26	green	red	green	yellow	2
27	green	yellow	green	green	2
28	green	yellow	green	green	2
29	yellow	green	green	green	2
30	red	green	yellow	green	2
31	green	green	yellow	green	2
32	yellow	green	green	yellow	2
33	yellow	yellow	green	green	2
34	green	green	green	yellow	2
35	green	yellow	green	green	2
36	red	green	red	red	1
37	yellow	green	yellow	yellow	1
38	red	green	yellow	yellow	1
39	yellow	green	yellow	yellow	1
40	red	red	yellow	green	1
41	red	green	red	red	1
42	yellow	yellow	yellow	green	1
43	red	green	red	red	1
44	yellow	green	red	red	1
45	green	green	red	yellow	1
46	yellow	green	yellow	yellow	1
47	red	green	red	yellow	1
48	green	green	yellow	yellow	1
49	red	green	yellow	red	1
50	red	red	red	red	0
51	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	0

# of domains with positive trend	# of youth	percent
Four domains	12	24%
Three domains	11	22%
Two domains	12	24%
One domain	14	27%
No positive domains	2	4%

The data in Tables 17 and 18 were collected from the juvenile justice information system. This data system records all official contact with the justice system in the youth's lifetime. We obtained data on all offenses committed for a year prior to intake into Options and for the time period after intake and up to the end of June 2006. The data are presented in two ways. The first row shows the number of youth who had a substantiated offense during the time period indicated. The four rows show the frequency distribution of youth with each category of offenses. The last row shows the mean number of offenses per youth. This analysis is based on 42 youth. Those youth who turned 18 prior to 6 months post intake were excluded because most of their post intake offenses would have been recorded in the adult system.

Table 17 shows that when comparing the 6 months prior to intake with the six months after intake, there was a significant difference between the pre and post frequency of youth with any substantiated offense. There was no significant difference when comparing the mean number of offenses between the two time periods.

Table 17. Comparison of juvenile justice involvement 6 months pre and post intake (n=42)*

	6 months pre intake	6 months post intake	
Any substantiated offense	20 (48%)	11 (26%)	Significant**
Frequency of substantiated offense			
No offenses	22 (55%)	31 (74%)	
1 offense	11 (26%)	5 (12%)	
2 offenses	3 (7%)	4 (10%)	
3 or more	6 (14%)	2 (4%)	
Mean	.88	.48	Not significant***

* All youth who turned 18 prior to 6-month post intake were removed from analysis

**McNemar chi square=3.767, p=.035

***paired t (41) = 1.73, p=.09

Table 18 provides the comparison between 9 months pre intake and 9 months post intake. Again there is a significant difference between incidences of substantiated offenses. Using this time period, the average number of offenses pre and post are significantly different (1.63 vs. .71)

Table 18. Comparison of juvenile justice involvement 9 months pre and post intake (n=38)*

	9 months pre intake	9 months post intake	
Any substantiated offense	23 (61%)	11 (29%)	Significant**
Frequency of substantiated offense			
No offenses	15 (40%)	27 (71%)	
1 offense	9 (24%)	2 (5%)	
2 offenses	5 (13%)	7 (18%)	
3 to 5 offenses	7 (19%)	1 (3%)	
6 or more	2 (6%)	1 (3%)	
Mean	1.63	.71	Significant***

* All youth who turned 18 prior to 9-month post intake were removed from analysis

**McNemar chi square=.965, p=.008

***paired t (37),=2.06, p=.046

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V. Lessons Learned

The community of Clark County has a very strong vision of recovery, exhibited by a belief in and strong practice of community-based services. The development and implementation of the Options program in our community was eased by:

- *Policies and practices* already in place supporting the belief that people can get better (versus a more medical model of illness).
- *Systems support* was in place. Prior funding through a SAMHSA System of Care grant had provided incentive for agency collaboration; people were already to some degree out of their silos and establishing relationships.
 - Multiple systems were already collaborating around children
- *History* of working together around children/youth/families with the highest level of need which was strengthened by the System of Care work.
- *Social Network Analysis* and *Resource Mapping* showed points of strength and gaps that existed specifically within the transition system.
- *Champions* – every community needs people who will be champions of the cause. We were fortunate in our community to have those individuals at the policy, program, and practice level.

We have learned many things over the course of our time together. We are sharing the following lessons with the anticipation and hope that every community can learn from our challenges.

1. Challenge your community, staff and yourself to allow and embrace true youth voice and youth-driven services.

The importance of true youth voice in the planning, implementation and ongoing evaluation of the program and services is invaluable. Reflecting back over past years, it is a reality that the Options program would not be what it is today without the insight and direction provided by the youth in the program. In many community planning processes, the most common error that individuals with the best of intentions seem to make is to design programs that are based upon what a community feels is needed and what will work the best. Although it seems obvious that we should not have to say “involve youth”, it is not always acted upon and carried out from the very beginning of working together – it generally is on the list of things we need to do and is done as more of an after thought. Designing a transition program and not asking for active involvement from those who will be affected the most by it, will in the end, not be what young people want. Communities need to know that gathering youth voice is a time consuming process because of the active lives of the youth. Professionals who come to the table to assist with the design and implementation may be very genuine and compassionate but they are still (in the majority of circumstances) being paid to do what they do – it is a part of their expected work schedule. For young people, they will be driven by how they are responded to. If they feel their contributions are being taken seriously and that what they have to say is driving and affecting

the overall program/service, they will participate because they are compelled to make a difference – both in the immediate and distant future. One of the most passionate and heartfelt thoughts about the need for a community to listen to its youth comes from Spencer Orso, a young woman who was a part of the Options program. Below is an excerpt from her personal writings.....

✚ *“When a kid says it’s hard to go on, listen, don’t be so quick to ignore him or disregard it. Some of the things I’ve learned in my very few years have taught me to listen and not judge. It sucks when you’re alone and no one seems to want to listen. As the days, then years go by, things seem to get clearer. When a child has something horrible on their mind all day, everyday, it gets very hard for them to function. What can you do? Here’s the answer: LISTEN!!! Never just forget. All a youth really needs sometimes is just someone compassionate enough to hear him or her. When something goes wrong in their life, a youth’s first response is where’s my help? If they never have that listening ear, their response is what the hell am I supposed to do? Everybody needs someone. The leaders in the community need to step up and lead the fight. Let the youth know that they have somewhere to go, someone to talk to.”*

2. Services and supports must be developmentally appropriate and appealing.

As a community truly embraces and celebrates the value of youth voice, they will also understand the value of services and supports that are developmentally appropriate and appealing to youth and young adults. A quote from one of the young people involved in the initial design of the program in Clark County was, “Even if you present it (the transition program) as something new but it is just more of the same, we will not come!” This was a powerful challenge to the community.

3. Question existing policy, rules and regulations.

Sometimes the greatest difficulties, obstacles, or problems that occur when establishing or conducting innovative practices and programs, is that standard operating procedures and the existence of “myths” are at times, bigger barriers than the reality of the truth. A barrier to services (particularly identified as being primary in the mental health system) was perceived to be age-directed funding streams. This assumption proved to be false due to changes in state law that had occurred a number of years prior but had seemingly gone unnoticed by system providers. Funding was not as clearly delineated into pre and post 18 years of age categories as was believed when the development of ideas around this program were formed. The lesson to take from all of this is - *Check all your assumptions and then look deeper!* Age was not a legal or regulatory barrier that existed – forcing a young person involved within the children’s mental health system to move to the adult mental health system on the magical day of their 18th birthday.

What our community now faced was more of an organizational culture barrier that still needed to be acknowledged and dispelled. Young people who are involved in the mental health system do not have to change clinicians or move to an “adult” provider when they turn 18 years of age. They can remain with the person they have established a relationship with. The end of this relationship is now able to be based upon a clinical decision – not a birthday. Communities should always consider the issues presented in your existing assumptions, identify the barriers presented and then push for clear written documentation to ascertain that the commonly accepted practice is in reality “fact” or “fiction”.

4. The realization that our work was about a successful transition into adulthood vs. a successful transition into adult services.

As our community began the visioning/strategic planning process, the term “transitioning youth” was understood by many to mean transitioning a young person from child serving systems to adult serving systems. The unspoken and unintentional assumption in this thought was that youth will not recover. As the steering committee continued to openly discuss the real meaning of “transitioning youth”, it was very clear to everyone involved that not all youth want or need to move into adult services. Although this may seem to be “less than earthshaking” at face value, what we recognized as a community was that it was our responsibility to assist young people with the ***successful transition into adulthood***, and for some youth that will mean into adult services, but we never take that as a given. This common realization amongst all involved in the program design process clearly moved this program to a different level of energy and creativity.

5. As with all relationships, the “engagement” period is critical.

The engagement period is that time frame in which young people get to know about the program and the staff so that they can make a well informed decision about whether or not they truly want to actively participate in the program. During the engagement period, people spend time getting to know each other, there is a testing of boundaries, and young people are watching to see if staff are “talking the talk and walking the walk”. For some youth, this may be their first introduction to unconditional commitment. Staff must be willing to meet the youth “where they are” in their life. The ideal circumstance is to not have the formal intake and paperwork even be considered as a part of the engagement process. Although this may not always be possible, depending on the requirements of the funding involved, it is highly desirable. The work that is done during the engagement period ultimately leads to the most critical factor in the relationship ~ ~ ~ trust.

6. Staff must understand and function in the capacity of an ally.

Although transition specialists/facilitators are staff who performs work that the community most commonly characterizes as case management, it truly is so much

more than that. The Options team often describes their role with youth as one of being an “ally” which is a term that originated with Bruce Anderson, Co-Founder of Community Activators. An ally is described as “any person who finds themselves in a position to support or guide another while they are making changes in their life”. It is critical for staff to understand that the most crucial time for the testing of a true ally is when a young person’s world feels like it is crashing down all at once. It is at that very point that an ally never leaves the side of the person they are supporting and in fact, places their energy into ensuring that the world is more welcoming for the young person and that they use their strengths to move them forward out of the difficult challenges that seem to be larger than life. It is important to understand that it is not the role of the transition specialist to be the crisis manager, that role is filled by others in the community.

7. Do not ignore your data.

This is a very easy lesson to articulate. Whether you love it or fear it, *DATA IS A MUST*. Collect it, analyze it, and use it to guide your decisions. Data can help you remain objective in work that can become very emotionally overpowering. Share the data with your community – young people and the staff involved work very hard towards achieving positive outcomes and the data will assist in telling that story to the rest of the community.

8. Understand both adolescent brain development and the culture associated with adolescence.

In order to be truly culturally competent, both the staff and the community – but particularly the transition staff – must be very clear in their philosophical beliefs around adolescents. This type of training and understanding is a priority.

9. Develop a strong framework within which to conduct your work.

Clark County undertook an extensive strategic planning process with the community. It was during this process that the elements for a very strong, clear and concise logic model surfaced. The logic model served as a reference on multiple occasions during the planning stages – primarily as a guide and framework to keep the program planning and design moving forward while juggling the desires and interests of the multiple stakeholders involved. As the program design strengthened and implementation began, it was the guiding principles of both the TIP system and Supported Employment that provided the structure around which the work occurred. Without this strong framework, the risks associated with trying to create a program that could be all things to all people would have been a reality. Having a strong framework within which to conduct ourselves kept the program responsive to its’ most important component.....young people.

10. It is ok to work “smarter” not “harder”.

It is critical to know your community and the existing systems that are currently involved in young people’s lives. It is equally important in the start-up phase of any new program/service to allow staff to do adequate resource mapping prior to beginning to work with young people. One of the community members involved in the planning and implementation of the Options program stated, “If you don’t spend the time knowing the system resources – and yes even the loopholes – then you will miss all of the opportunities there are to help solve problems”. In addition to the upfront work involved with knowing the community, the Options team also realized they needed a reminder on a day to day basis that would help them to work smarter – not harder. That rule of thumb became the following: *“If you want something for a young person more than they want it for themselves, step back, take a deep breath and regroup”*.

VI. Conclusion

It is, at times, difficult to describe what one does on a daily basis when tasked to carry out such critically important work. As was so eloquently stated in the principle statements that guided the work of the Options team, ***“We believe that our life experiences brought us to this work for a reason that is magnificent.”*** The Options program has had the distinct pleasure to share their experiences with others over the past several years. We always remind people that this is work worth doing. It has the potential to recognize the essence of individual youth in ways far too few have experienced before. It provides practical, one-foot-in-front-of-the-other strategies to walk out of isolation. And it offers youth the tools to build their vision of what they can choose to move toward – a life built on their own gifts, strengths and actions. Our belief in an individual’s ability to learn, grow and make positive change happen helps us all move forward – youth, staff, a program, a community.

VII. Products available to the community

- 1) Logic Model (Appendix A)
- 2) Program Manual – please contact DeDe Sieler, Clark County Department of Community Services, 360.397.2130, dede.sielier@clark.wa.gov
- 3) Fidelity measures and Youth Satisfaction measures – please contact Nancy Koroloff, Portland State University, Regional Research Institute, 503.725.4157, koroloffn@pdx.edu.