



# How did access to job services affect youth with disabilities?



The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, a law passed in 2014, improves services for people to find and keep jobs. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires vocational rehabilitation agencies to use some of the money they receive from the federal government (about \$1 of every \$7) for pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities. Using money for pre-employment transition services might help students with disabilities because there are few free services to help youth with disabilities train for jobs.

Youth with disabilities, including those who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), might need support for finding and training for jobs beyond what school traditionally offers. Students with disabilities often do not have as many opportunities for career development and training, could have trouble finding work because of their disability, and might come from lower-income families.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and pre-employment transition services could make a difference in the lives of youth receiving SSI. Understanding how pre-employment transition services can connect youth with disabilities to jobs can help leaders continue to provide services that

## What are pre-employment transition services?

Pre-employment transition services are services offered to students with disabilities that focus on the transition from high school to higher education and/or a paid job, or both. Services encompass five key service types:

- / **Job exploration** counseling, such as career counseling or vocational interest inventories
- / **Work-based learning experiences**, such as job shadowing or internships
- / **Postsecondary education counseling**
- / **Workplace readiness training**, such as life skills and financial literacy
- / **Instruction in self-advocacy**, such as self-determination training or peer mentoring



make a difference in the lives of young people. For high school students with disabilities, going to college (or another form of higher education) or into a paid job can improve their future job prospects, earn more money, and improve their overall quality of life.

## More youth who receive SSI are connecting with vocational rehabilitation agencies and earning more money at work

Now that pre-employment transition services are more widely available, youth who receive SSI are more involved with vocational rehabilitation agencies and earn more from paid jobs. Connecting to a vocational rehabilitation agency means that youth can use important services that lead to improved school or job outcomes and may earn more money.

After the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, more young people ages 14 to 24 who receive SSI applied to vocational rehabilitation agencies and signed individualized plans for employment. All students with disabilities can use pre-employment transition services, so applying to a vocational rehabilitation agency shows

that a student is interested in receiving more services to achieve their goals. Creating and signing an individualized plan for employment creates a plan for a specific goal youth set. Then, vocational rehabilitation counselors can connect them with services (beyond pre-employment transition services) to achieve their goals.

**After the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act was passed, youth receiving SSI were more likely to:**

/ **Have a paid job: 20% of youth earned money** through a job from 2014 to 2021, **up from 16%** from 2010 to 2013

/ **Have higher yearly earnings:** Average **yearly earnings increased** nearly **50%** to **\$696** from **2014 to 2016**, up from **\$457** from **2010 to 2013**



**Section 301** allows SSI recipients to receive monthly payments even if they no longer meet the Social Security Administration's definition of having a disability as long as they participate in a vocational rehabilitation (or similar) program. Continuing to receive SSI payments can help people during the transition from relying on benefits to finding and maintaining employment.



Since the **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act**, vocational rehabilitation agencies saw an increase in applications from youth who receive SSI. In 2010, 1,181 youth who received SSI applied to a VR agency; in 2019, that number was 30,569.

### In the future, more youth could use work incentives and continue research on the link between pre-employment transition services and vocational rehabilitation service use

Some programs for youth with disabilities did not see more overall use after the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act passed, including the work incentive programs Section 301 and the Student Earned Income Exclusion. In states in which pre-employment transition services were more available (and were used more), more youth used Section 301 than before the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act passed.

Youth or their families might not know about work incentive programs or might worry that using those programs could affect the SSI benefits they receive. In the future, vocational rehabilitation staff could explore whether more youth are a fit for work incentives so that they can enroll in the programs. And, as pre-employment transition services continue to become more widely available, work incentive program use might increase, as it did in states where pre-employment transition services are already used more.

The **Student Earned Income Exclusion** allows students younger than age 22 to exclude a portion of their earnings from their income so they don't have to pay taxes on this income. In 2023, a student could exclude up to \$2,220 of earnings per month and a total of \$8,950 in earnings each year.



Authors: Emily Harrison, Isabel Musse, Todd Honeycutt, and Amal Harrati. More information about this topic will be found in a forthcoming article, "VR, SSA, and Earnings Outcomes for Youth Receiving SSI Before and After WIOA's Passage."