



MS Model Youth Transition Innovation

MYTI is a national Social Security demonstration project designed to assist young people to become employed through transition interventions from school to work, thereby reducing reliance on public benefits.

FALL 2008 ISSUE
Final Publication

MYTI

connections

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER
OF THE MYTI PROJECT

MYTI Has Ended...

MYTI has ended its five year demonstration through the Social Security Administration as of September 30, 2008. MYTI has been honored to represent this collaborative effort of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Harrison County School District, Jackson County School District, Gulfport WIN Job Center, MS Social Security Administration, The Arc of Mississippi and Marc Gold and Associates. Through these partnerships, youth from ages 10 to 25 were served with a focus on transition phases with designated vocational activities and benefits planning to lead to a career, earning a wage and reducing Social Security benefits.

SUMMARY OF STUDENT OUTCOMES

- 77 customized jobs
- 114 work experiences, including customized work experiences
- 621 social security benefits introductions, summaries, and analyses
- 196 Vocational Profiles (Life books for younger students) of Students
- 138 Vocational Plans (vocational, work experience, or job plans)
- 113 Employers engaged with MYTI to meet a student's needs
- 144 Mentor experiences
- 85 Students managing their Student Funds for job supports (teaching self determination)

Each of the students has been transitioned from the project to their appropriate local lead partner, schools or vocational rehabilitation services. This transition process provided the student and the family with a benefits summary, a link to their lead partner, and a transition summary for future vocational services necessary to continue their career development.



Joe Anderson loads groceries into a customer's vehicle at his job at Winn Dixie grocery store.

While the project has ended, there are some targeted activities that will be continued through each of the partners in their own manner. Your role in continuing transition services to students is identified within your agency or school district.

MYTI has several phase-out activities that will occur over the course of the next year. The following activities will occur in the coming months:

- MGA will work with the partner agencies to fulfill the commitment to students not achieving employment. Individual plans are being developed to consult with each district to further those job development efforts.
- There will also be a mentor leader at each school district during this time to continue the mentoring efforts.
- The Arc of Mississippi will continue liaison efforts with employers to further job development activities and job shadowing services within the schools.

Students will have access to a Benefits Specialist/Community Work Incentives Coordinator through MDRS. Supports for those students with an

Individual Development Account will continue to facilitate the fulfillment of their goals for home ownership or self employment. The MYTI web site and MYTI Database will continue for a year to offer information on students and their continued quest for employment and for the ongoing efforts to create an effective interagency transition model.

The MYTI staff has taken their skills and experiences into our communities in a variety of positions working with people. We are proud to have had dedicated staff working with each of you to assist each student to a better future where they are contributing to their communities. It has been a privileged for all of us to have the opportunity to experience the best practices of our times in this project: transition phases, customized employment and work experiences, benefits analysis, student directed budgets, and an interagency effort. Your participation and dedication to the students in the project is greatly appreciated.

Please feel free to share this with anyone that may have been a part of the MYTI Experience!



Andrew Higginbotham shows Job Coach, Ellen Mitchell the certificate he received for participating in an SSA conference.

What a Team We Are!

What a great 5 years! What can we say?.....Look at what we've been through together and accomplished....students learning about themselves...students gaining self-esteem... families and friends helping each other through Hurricane Katrina...students starting jobs....students contributing to families....families connecting with schools....contacts we never would have made without the support of teachers, agencies, and MYTI staff all linking together. What a TEAM we are! **Priceless...**

Adding to that thought...look at where we are going – so many students looking forward to different futures due to collaboration on the part of teachers and agencies – futures that were established and will outlast MYTI as a grant, but not MYTI as a model. All of us as a team can look back and be proud of what has been accomplished in the five years that we had together to make a difference. Even though we encountered barriers, staff changes, changes in student enrollment...many ups and downs..., all of them contributed to the success of the project and the successful interagency model that will be the future of the students. Students, staff, teachers, contractors, employers, community partners – we all have worked as one team. Our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you!



Patty Horton, MYTI Project Director
MS Dept. of Rehabilitation Services



Rebecca Doyle, MYTI Project Co-Executive
MS Dept. of Rehabilitation Services

Farewell from The Arc

Although funded as a demonstration project, MYTI has become a systems change project by helping students, teachers, and families get a better understanding of post school employment. It has clearly shown how the process of discovery can be used to define the components necessary for successful transition. Based on a premise of employment for everyone, those involved have taken place in a series of activities leading to off campus work experiences and customized jobs.

Families rarely have anyone talk about a positive future of employment for their children. This project (like no other that I am aware of) has shown that everyone is employable with the right set of activities and supports. Families now have a different set of goals and demands of adult service providers as a result of seeing positive and successful interventions by the project.

The key component of this project has been to develop collaboration between schools, families, and the business community. All players have been willing to try new concepts so that students learn to work while they are still in school. It is also a necessary part of transition to have students exit school with a job. Schools have learned that students need to participate in off-campus work experiences to shape their interests for future employment. Parents have had to raise the bar of expectancies for their children. Employers have been willing to mentor students and to learn the components of customized employment. Many employers do not normally think of work as less than forty hours per week or negotiate a job that is not based on a job description. However, this project has shown employers the benefits of job negotiation and how customization actually works.

Transition services for Harrison and Jackson County schools are changed forever. The greatest challenge ahead is how to spread these strategies to other school districts so that all families see their children achieve employment within their community as they exit school. This is a large task but worth it for the future of all children. The Arc of Mississippi will continue to promote the concepts of this project to stakeholders throughout Mississippi.

The Mentoring Program Gets Positive Results!

The mentoring program for Harrison County School resulted in two very positive results. The first being the impact it had on the social, academic, and employment skills of our MYTI students. The MYTI students had regular education students focusing on them in all three areas. By the MYTI students interacting socially with the students on campus and off campus, they were more comfortable with their mentors helping them academically on campus and discussing their jobs with them. The MYTI students became more aware of the different types of jobs that teenagers have and the skills needed to be successful in those areas.

The second result was it was an eye opener for many regular education students who had never really seen the MYTI kids at school. The MYTI kids had been the “invisible” students on campus. With the mentoring, the regular education students realized there were little differences in what they wanted in life. They wanted to have fun, friends, and a good job just like anyone else. The mentors were also impressed with several of the jobs that the MYTI students had and for how long they had been employed. Overall, it was an experience that everyone benefited by not just the MYTI students.

“We were so pleased to be one of those families you helped.” ~ The Swindle Family



A “MYTI” Farewell to all the Families, Teachers, and Employers I Have Met

Kathy Williams, Harrison County Transition Specialist

What started out to be a five year model grant designed to help students with significant disabilities find their employment niche in life, has turned into a building of relationships. These relationships will leave an indelible impression on an entire community.

For the past five years, my primary focus has been, through the customized process, to open not only doors for students but to open the minds of teachers, parents and employers, and it has turned into knowledge beyond my imagination. The village of professionals and para-professionals were trained to utilize the customized employment process as a means of learning ‘the best of who the student is’ to ensure a smooth transition from school to work. Through the process of discovery, paid and unpaid work experiences were negotiated on the student’s behalf based on their conditions of employment, interests, competencies, and contributions available to employers. The scope of this process has developed into relationships with the assistance of a village that includes teachers, students, families, employers, and resource agencies, all working toward the common goal of employment. Paid and non paid employment experiences have meant so much to the students and their families.

To that village of people, I would like to personally thank you for your patience, consideration and for allowing me to share in a small portion of your life. Thank you to those employers who were willing to give our students an opportunity that they otherwise may not have had. It has been my pleasure to have served you and I want you to know what it has ultimately meant to me. Getting to know you and being able to watch students grow outside of their self contained environments through unpaid work experiences to paid employment positions has been life changing for me. I felt that the students were mine and felt a mother’s kind of pride watching self esteem, initiative, and self advocacy skills grow with them. These students have held jobs, gone through financial literacy classes, have learned how to utilize the transit system to go back and forth to work when needed, but most of all have developed friendships with co-workers and customers. That in itself has been a great moral booster for us all.

I was very proud that we had students chosen to participate on behalf of the Mississippi Model Youth Transition Innovation Project (MYTI) as presenters at two major conferences: the Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) National Conference in Baltimore, MD and the International Conference on Disabilities held in Washington, D. C. To see a student, who previously was an ultimate introvert, glow with self esteem and speak in front of a room full of people was a huge accomplishment.

A Goodbye from Jill Cartledge



MYTI has been an amazing experience for me and for the many students and families I’ve been privileged to work with. I have learned so much about the power of opportunity and observed first-hand the transforming capability that it can give to all people, with or without disabilities. I have been able to help participants secure customized employment opportunities, acting on their behalf, that they might not have been able to secure themselves. I have watched shy, introverted students become outgoing and assertive young adults. Perhaps the most enduring aspect for me is that I know at any time I can drop-in to visit them and know that they will be doing just great!

The greatest negative is not the end of the project itself, but rather, the absence of anything like MYTI for the many who have not had, and may never have, the opportunity to have a work or job experience. MYTI lost so much time due the impact of Hurricane Katrina which in essence reduced a 5 year grant to 3.5 years. The Gulf Coast is still dealing with the aftermath emotionally, physically and financially and may for years to come.

I am blessed to have received training from Norciva Shumpert and Mike Callahan, which will guide me for the rest of my life in my career and personal life. I am blessed to have had the opportunity to work with a great team of people who became my second family. But most of all, I am blessed (and grateful) to have earned the trust of so many families in my attempt to help their sons and daughters reach their employment goals. You have all made such a difference in my life, and you'll always be close to my heart. MYTI may be ending, but our friendships will endure long after.

Quotes of Note

"I felt it was an honor to work with so many of the teachers that gave of their free time to be part of the MYTI program. I also thought it was inspiring to see so many people who worked for the MYTI program knowing that they had a job that would soon be in jeopardy and still continued to give. I personally could see much growth over time from those employed in the MYTI program from my own observation and personal perspective."

~ Mark Nagell, a teacher at the Child Development Center in Gulfport, Harrison County School District

"I do want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything you have done for my students."

~ Susan Whittman, a teacher at the Child Development Center in Gulfport, Harrison County School District

Final Thoughts from Jackson County

Jackson County School District has participated in the MYTI process for approximately 2 years. The MYTI process has brought many benefits to the students with disabilities as well as teachers.

In the beginning stages of the collaborative efforts, Jackson County Schools identified 42 students to participate as well as teachers who were servicing students with more challenging needs that make job placement a difficult task for families and educational institutes.

Next, as a result of strong consulting leaders from MYTI, an interagency agreement was developed between Jackson County Schools and MDRS. This agreement provided a full time Transition Coordinator as well as guidelines to move toward developing Transition Specialists to support students with disabilities in a job placement.

In addition, MYTI consultants provided invaluable training to teachers that opened avenues and completely changed the philosophy of how Jackson County Schools incorporated the requirements for academic growth and transition to post secondary life after school.

As Jackson County Schools progressed, embracing the philosophy of customized employment, the district took a strong stand on raising the standard. One positive benefit built upon another which provided many new opportunities to students. The district moved from a minimal state mandated curriculum to an integration of the whole person. An Extended Curriculum was developed by teachers with the incorporation of Discovery Activities thus setting the standard for a results oriented course of study. This course of study was outlined and broken into appropriate age ranges. Most proudly, an additional age range added for 19-21 year olds was added. This population of students is currently receiving services at the local MGCCC where other non disabled students normally attend at this age. These are just a few benefits that can be mentioned. However, I must not let the opportunity go by to say THANK YOU, MYTI, for helping our GOOD district move to GREAT! We have many other avenues to complete as we will always be moving forward, and you have given us our START!

Tonya Green and Charlotte Guy

LEARNING FROM MYTI

What did we learn during the project!?

1. All students, regardless of their disability, have the capacity to do job tasks. Throughout the project students have had discovery and work experiences that have demonstrated their potential contributions to an employer. The primary reason for non employment for some of these students is resources to devote to students on an individual basis to develop the job. A secondary reason is reluctance from families and school personnel for students that are in their last few years of school.
2. Students with significant disabilities need customized employment information at least by 10 years of age to assist families and others in recognizing a way for them to be employed. Without this knowledge, school personnel and families would only see the student competing with others for a job that an employer would most likely find others more qualified thus leaving that student unemployed.
3. Families and students are willing to work if they have an understanding of the impact of work on their Social Security Benefits. Access to personnel to explain this has been invaluable.
4. Schools and other employment related personnel are not aware of customized employment strategies.

MYTI's Top Ten Accomplishments

Many of these accomplishments reflect the work of the partners of MYTI. These do not include the many young people's lives that were changed as a result of this project.

Year 1 – Year 5

October 1, 2003 – September 30, 2008



1. **Development of a Mississippi transition model; Career Connections:** Career Connections is an interagency service for youth 10 years of age to 18 years offered in the classroom and 19 to 22 in the community classroom. The partnership creates a focus on vocational skills, experiences, jobs, and social security information. This is the first national model creating phases and an interagency approach.
2. **Development of an Individual Development Account Project:** The project offers IDAs to students and supports them to move toward financial saving. This is the first one in the nation offered for students with disabilities.
3. **Experiences with Student Budgets:** Schools and families experienced student directed budgets with students and their families selecting their own job coaches to paying a neighbor for transportation. This is one of the few projects in the nation offering self direction through student budgets.
4. **Capacity Building:** Marc Gold & Associates has provided training sessions with project staff and school personnel since March 2004. The schools and MDRS have approximately 80 professionals skilled in various components of transition services; customized employment, work experiences, transition phases, Social Security Waivers, Individual Development Accounts, systematic instruction.
5. **Team Meetings:** The project used various teams to implement necessary activities for the grant. This gave project staff opportunities to educate team members in how "all students are employable" thus engaging the team members in building a community of awareness and capacity to employ students with significant disabilities. Some of the teams were the selection committee, local management team, mentor services, and the state level management team.
6. **Interagency Data Base:** The project developed and uses an electronic record keeping data base that is protected and accessible by all partners and families.
7. **Community Classroom:** This is a school-funded and managed class at one of the community colleges for students age 19 – 21 years. This class is currently at the Gautier Campus of the Gulf Coast Community Colleges and focuses completely on community participation and employment for the students.
8. **Work Experiences for students with significant disabilities:** Schools shifted job descriptions for aids to become job coaches, purchased or contracted for transportation, and developed a unique set of sites for all students to experience. Customized work experiences were also developed.
9. **Self Discovery Classes at the WIN Job Center:** This is the only job center in the nation offering self discovery classes to assist anyone in identifying their conditions of employment, contributions, and areas of interest to direct employment. The job center provides tours and information to students to learn how to use their services.
10. **Tools and Materials Developed:** The following tools, forms, and procedures were developed:
 - MYTI Website
 - Customized Employment Forms and Processes
 - Work Experience Guidelines
 - IEP tips for inclusion of vocational interventions
 - Discovery Curriculum
 - Family Transition Guide

There are 14 individuals enrolled in the Individual Development Account Program designed to promote savings by matching the student savings with four dollars to one dollar saved by the student of earned income. These matched savings can be used to purchase a home, start a business, or to further education.

Total Individual Savings with Interest \$12,637.34

Total Match Savings with Interest \$43,974.80

Total Available for Asset Purchase \$56,612.14

Thanks to MYTI Employers

WE would like to take this opportunity to thank the employers that have given us an opportunity to look within their work place to customize a job for one of our students. This opportunity identified some of their needs that were developed into a job description for a targeted student. By customizing this job, the employer's needs were met, and the targeted student was able to contribute their skills and abilities. A win-win for our community occurred because of the willingness of these employers.

Job - Employer	
Academy Sports	Island View Casino & Resort
Allen Beverages, Inc.	KAFE Katrina
Americorp Boys&Girls Clubs	Lowes #690
AMF Gulfport Bowling Lanes	Mandal's
Arby's Restaurant	McDonalds Corp
Bailey Millworks	Mississippi Power
Barnhill's Buffet	Northrop Grumman
Big Lots	O'Charley's
Blimpie Subs and Salads	Plan House Printing
Boomtown Casino	Raising Cane's
Bracken Fen Gun Dogs	Redd Pest Solutions
Burger King	Rethreads
Chilly Willy's Pizzeria	Ross Dress for Less
Chuck E Cheese's	Ryan's Steakhouse
Cinemark Theatre	Sam's Club
Cinemark USA, Inc.	Shell Food Mart
ClawDaddy's Crawfish	Shoe Carnival
Coast Radio	SMHS
DZs Garden Center	Sonic Drive-In
Flying J Travel Plaza	St.Martin School District
Garden Park Medical Center	State Farm Insurance
Goody's	Subway
Grace Health Care	TGI Friday's
Gulf Coast Outpatient Surgery	TJ Maxx
Gulf Coast Veterinary Emergency Hospital	Treasure Bay Casino
Gulfport School District	Uncle Sam's Quick Stop
Haagen Daaz Ice Cream Shop	Waffle House
Wholesale Home Furnishings	Ward's Restaurant
Humane Society	Whispering Pines Doggy Dude Ranch
Imperial Palace	WIN Job Center

Work-Experience - Employer	
Four C's Restaurant	Limited Too
AbilityWorks	Little Shepherd's Christian Preschool and Day Care
Campbell Construction	MDOT
Child Development Center	Lakeview
CJ Clip Joint	MG&A
ClawDaddy's Crawfish	Ocean Springs Hospital
D'Iberville City Hall	Orange Grove Public Library
Dr. Winn	Pepsi
East Central Community Center	Pizza Hut
East Central High School	Pleasant Hill Day Care
East Central High School -Cafeteria	Precision Automotive Machining
East Central Lower Elementary	Reel Video
East Central Upper Elementary Library	Sassy's Restaurant
Family Dollar	Saucier Trading
Fayard Grocery & Meat	Singing River EPA
First American Printing	Special Services Center
Four Seasons Florist	Special Services HCSD
Greer's	SSC Office
Gulfport WIN Center	State Farm Insurance
Humane Society of South MS	Vanceleave HS
Hurley Athletic Club	Whispering Pines Golf Course
Hurley Farm & Feed	Williams Painting
Ice Princess Snow Cones	Win Job Center
Jack & Jill	Woods Heating & Cooling, Inc.
Jackson County District Office	
Jones Produce	
Keith's Vacuum Center	

These employers gave students a time-limited work experience to learn their culture and job tasks. These valuable experiences have built skills and guided future plans for employment for those students.

Joe: A TRUE Success Story by Lisa Ladner



Jill Cartledge and Joe Anderson hold a certificate that Joe gave to his employer.

Joe is a four year participant in the MS Model Youth Transition Innovation YTD demonstration project. He became involved in MYTI when he was in his last year in school, shortly before receiving his high school certificate of completion at age 21. As Joe's Benefits Specialist, I worked with Joe and his family to boost employment expectations, to learn about how his SSI and net monthly income might be affected by working, and to identify interests, skill sets, and potential accommodation needs due to multiple disabilities. This process helped guide his path to employment which involved a short term part time job at a local chain restaurant, and then later to his stated "dream job" at a nearby grocery store that is part of a large regional chain.

Four months into his part-time restaurant job, Hurricane Katrina destroyed the restaurant and therefore ended Joe's job. I helped him obtain disaster unemployment assistance to supplement his SSI until MYTI staff could assist him by negotiating his current job at the grocery store in a developed job created around Joe's contributions, interests, and conditions of employment. The job title for the tasks Joe offers is currently called a customer service associate. Joe celebrated his 1 year anniversary in May of 2007. In October of 2007, he was able to obtain employer provided healthcare. He now works full time, between 35 and 50 hours per week, depending on the store's needs. His career seems set and his recent Employee of the Month award indicates that he has the confidence and support of his employer to stay as long as he wants.

The enhanced YTD Waivers did much to ease Joe's mother's fears about the effect of his earnings on his SSI. As Joe began his employment, I helped him use and understand the Earned Income Exclusions so that his net income favored the pursuit and retention of a job. As transportation was another barrier to employment, I helped Joe arrange door to door public Para-transit to and from his job, the cost of which is offset by the use of the Impairment Work Related Expense (IWRE). Joe also has opened an Individual Development Account (IDA) with his mother's approval so that he can pursue another long term goal, owning his own home. As his job earnings increased, his SSI benefits have decreased to the point that he soon will be totally independent of SSI benefits. Joe became eligible for his company's retirement annuity plan in October 2008.

Through the careful discovery of Joe's interests, skills, contributions, support and environment needs in a job, development of an employment plan, representation and negotiation with the employer, informed guidance from his benefits counselor, support to his family about work expectations and benefits management, and linking with state VR services, Joe's situation represents an example of the effective melding of transition interventions with targeted work incentives.

A Message from Terry Newman...

I have been asked to provide input regarding the MYTI project from my perspective as the Transition Coordinator for Harrison County School District. My participation began just after the birth of the idea that Mike Callahan and a few others sparked that students with significant cognitive delays and others, largely found in Self-Contained classrooms, receiving SSI benefits and bound traditionally for 'brick and mortar' programs might be able to participate in paid and non-paid employment. Additionally, providing a system-wide in-service training program for teachers and support staff that work with these youth encourage them to take on a new commitment. MYTI injected a 'new' premise to these staff and the families of these students that a brighter 'future' was out there for them, if we only would make some changes in our approach in their education and training.

The effort to positively impact this population, that was largely under served, in relation to this goal was and is exciting and has had extremely positive, life long ramifications to the youth and their families. This renewed effort towards students being at least partially and many wholly self-sustaining citizens in our community energized me as well as Special Education teachers who have always felt there was more their students could do than collect public benefits.

Over time, students participating in MYTI have developed life skills that only the work place can provide. The experience literally changed them for life. They matured in ways that I nor their teachers and parents could ever believe. The positive impact of MYTI will be felt not just with the impacted students but for their siblings as well, and it will last for years and years. Teachers who were burned out and had lost energy over the years and parents who couldn't see a 'real' future for their children are now excited about what our youth participants are headed toward, an exciting future.

The entire staff at MG&A trained, supported and nourished each of us in the school district so that we could 'see a new future' and make system wide changes that would last far longer than our own years with the school district. Helping us to 'think outside the box' also helped me to engage system level administration in supporting students in their new paths toward employment.

I have been fortunate enough to spend 37 years in the field of Special Education, as a Teacher, Principal and Special Education Coordinator. Never in all these years was my challenge as large, mind changing or rewarding as my participation in the MYTI program. As MYTI concludes, Harrison County School District faces a future full of promise and commitment to students that it did not previously have. Teachers are trained, excited, motivated and ready to carry on with what they have learned from the MYTI project. Young teachers with far more energy than I will carry on into the future. I am humbled to have had a part in the project.

Terry Newman, Harrison County Special Education Transition Coordinator

Career Connections

Proposed Youth Model of Interagency Vocational Services

Phase I WORK BEGINNINGS	Phase II WORK DISCOVERY	Phase III WORK CONNECTIONS	Phase IV LIFE CONNECTIONS
Education	Education	Education and Vocational Rehabilitation Services within schools WIA Youth Services	Education and Vocational Rehabilitation Services Within and out of schools WIA
Medicaid & State Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services			
Grades 5 th to 7 th 10 years to 12 years	Grades 7 th to 10 th 13 – 15 years	Grades 10 th to 12 th 16 – 18 years	Grade 12 th 19 – 21 years Services provided off high school campus
Services by teacher			Services by teacher and school based vocational rehabilitation services
Discovery	Discovery – Vocational Focus	Update Discovery	Update Discovery
Life Book	Vocational Profile	Vocational Profile	New Vocational Profile
Future Vision	On School Campus Work Experience Plan	Community Work Experience Plan	Customized Work Experience Plan
Vocational Plan	On School Campus Work Experiences*	Community Work Experiences*	Customized Work Experience
Occupational Exposure	Job Shadow	Job Shadow	Possible Apprenticeships, OJT
	Self Employment Plan	Customized Employment Plan	Customized Employment Plan
	Small Business	Representational Portfolio	Representational Portfolio
		Customized Job	Customized Job
Business Tour	Mentor	Mentor	Mentor
Agency Involvement			
Intro to Vocational Rehabilitation Services	Educate about eligibility for Vocational Rehabilitation Services	Refer to Vocational Rehabilitation Services	Co-Enrollment with MDRS
Intro to SSA Benefits	SSA Benefits Review	SSA Benefits Review	SSA Benefits Review and Analysis
Visit to Job Center	Visit to Job Center	Participate in WIA Youth services	Co Enrollment with WIA adult services and Job Center
Service Learning: Volunteering in settings in the school and in the community where typical youth volunteer			

** Hours and days will vary based on individuality of the student. It is expected that students would begin with less amount of the time away from the school at age 14 to 18 to experience high school and then from 19 years to 21 years old, the student is not in a school campus environment.*

Harrison County MYTI Success Stories

Kathy Williams, Harrison County Transition Specialist

Students in the Harrison Country School District have been fortunate to have had the team of the Mississippi Model Youth Transition Innovation Project (MYTI) staff, teachers, families, job coaches, employers, and resource agencies working together on their behalf to ensure paid and unpaid work experiences.

For the students employed, I am very proud of the success of them all, but two students are most memorable to me, Daniel F. and Darnell S. Daniel was employed by Lowe's as an afternoon, part-time, garden associate to water and maintain the aesthetics of the plants. The negotiations for Daniel were quite involved as he utilized his wheelchair to maneuver around Lowe's warehouse. Accommodations had to be made for the integrity tests required of all employees. Daniel's Mom and I assisted him by reading/explaining the questions and allowing him to answer. Once hired, Daniel told the store manager that he wanted to ultimately have her job and requested more per hour than a starting employee receives. Daniel did not want it but needed the assistance of a job coach, and he had the opportunity to interview all potential prospects. He asked one job coach candidate a crucial question that took us all by surprise when he asked the coach, "What will you do when you get mad at me?" to which the coach was not prepared to answer. His non-answer and the look on his face proved to be answer enough for Daniel, and he was not hired because Daniel felt he would not be comfortable with the gentleman as his job coach. What an example of empowerment in force for a student who had none before. Daniel went on to work for Lowe's until health problems hindered his further employment. But make no mistake, Daniel's health has improved, and he is awaiting another employment placement.



Pictured from Left to Right: Martin Gerry, SSA Deputy Commissioner; Darnell, MYTI Participant; Dr. Margaret Giannini, Director, Office of Disability, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The other student who stands out for me is Darnell. Darnell was a very shy young man who could not make eye contact to hold a conversation, had no choice about decisions made in his life, and had little to no contact with anyone outside his self contained family/school environment. His only friends were those at school. Darnell is now a vibrant young man who will have been employed with Shoe Carnival for four years on November 29. Darnell works during and after regular school scheduled hours, relies on school transportation during school, and the local city transit to get him back and forth to work during holidays when school is not in session. He was awarded an official flag that had flown over one of the governmental buildings by U.S. Congressman Gene Taylor. Darnell was also nominated and selected to represent the MYTI project at two major conferences, the Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) National Conference held in Baltimore, MD, and the International Conference on Disabilities held in Washington, D. C. At the conference in Washington, D. C., he was accompanied by his mother who initially did not think he could manage

without her, but she was pleasantly surprised when he spoke with confidence in front of an audience. At the conference in Baltimore, MD, he was accompanied not by mom, but by a peer mentor. He loved it and had a wonderful time hanging out with young men his age.

Darnell currently attends and contributes to a financial literacy class where he is learning how to budget, manage, and save his money with the hope of someday being able to purchase his own home. Through that class he has made friends and also utilizes the local transit system because his family does not have transportation.

This is just an example of two young people who persevered and were determined to be successful outside of their self contained environments. MYTI was able to introduce these families to a different world of existence ...a world of possibilities. I feel honored and privileged to have been a part of a project that has made such a difference and growth in their lives and mine... thank you.

Marc Gold & Associates
4104 Gautier-Vancleave Road
Suite 102
Gautier, MS 39553



MS Model Youth Transition Innovation

MYTI

connections

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER
OF THE MYTI PROJECT