

# ***Rhode Island Department of Health Internship Program for Youth with Special Healthcare Needs***

## ***An Innovation Station Promising Practice***

**Purpose:** This document is intended to support MCH professionals to implement a practice found in Innovation Station. This resource provides the information needed to replicate the practice and is divided into two sections: the first section provides a high-level overview of the practice while the second section describes how to implement the practice. For additional information on any of the content provided below, please reach out to the practice contact located at the bottom of this document.

### **Section I: Practice Overview**

<b>Location:</b>	Rhode Island Department of Health	<b>Title V/MCH Block Grant Measures Addressed</b>
<b>Category:</b>	Promising Practice	Transition Well-functioning system of care for CYSHCN
<b>Date Submitted:</b>	12/2018	

#### **Practice Description**

The RI Department of Health’s (RIDOH’s) goal was to address the successful transition of YSHCN to all aspects of adulthood (health care, education, work, independence) specifically focusing on transition to employment through the facilitation of an Internship Program within the RIDOH.

The RIDOH developed an initiative that contributes to reducing health inequities for youth with special needs by providing work experience opportunities for YSHCN, who are traditionally an underemployed population because of their challenges.

#### **Purpose**

Since 2011, the RIDOH Internship Program aim has been to address self-determination to give a population of youth that is nationally considered to be vulnerable a chance to gain skills through a real work experience. This program helps students become work ready and gain important soft skills including socialization, relationship development, time management, and workplace etiquette etc. The opportunity to develop these skills provides youth with and without disabilities the ability break through the barriers of stigma, while working towards their goal of independence. Working within a supportive environment in a workplace internship helps students build employment skills while having the option to access the support needed. As the system advocates for policy changes that directly affect this population’s ability to successfully

transition to adulthood, the internship program allows interns to begin to change how they are seen and included in the system to achieve successful transition to adulthood.

## Practice Foundation

The research model applied to the Internship Program was Project SEARCH. Project SEARCH is an evidence-based national model that has met with incredible success and has been implemented throughout the US to provide a one-year school-to-work internship program for youth with special needs/disabilities between the ages of 18 and 22. In this model, the program takes place at a host business, in full collaboration with a local school district. Through braided funding and combined resources, participating agencies work together to provide education and support to students for three 10-week rotations throughout the year. Students learn different employability skills in each rotation, with the overall goal of obtaining competitive employment by the end of the internship.

The RIDOH utilized Project SEARCH as a model for the development of the Internship Program. Most internship candidates are enrolled in the State’s Regional Transition Academies or School Transition Programs which focus on work readiness and independent skill building in preparation for transition to adulthood. The ability of these programs to secure job experience placement for these youth is challenging and often limited, although, greatly needed. The RIDOH, Health Equity Institute (HEI) Internship Program is a significant initiative in addressing and working toward reducing health inequities for this population through successful transition to adulthood specific to work exploration and independence.

## Core Components

The program places transition-age students with particular needs/disabilities enrolled in the State’s Regional Transition Academies and School Transition Programs in office-based and entry-level internships throughout the Department in programs willing to work with a student intern during a 90-hour timeframe. The internship process includes an initial interview, on-site shadowing, and orientation training. Supervision and support are provided daily by an Internship Facilitator who assesses placement match, skills development, and assists with other work-related issues/accommodations. Upon completion of the program, participating students complete an evaluation regarding skills gained through the internship experience, for future employment expectations.

## Practice Activities

Core Component	Activities	Operational Details
<b>Initial Interview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting student at RIDOH and school personnel</li> </ul>	Student is brought to RIDOH for introduction and assessment
<b>On-site Shadowing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tour of RIDOH Programs</li> </ul>	Student and school personnel spend two hours observing RIDOH programs/ work setting
<b>Orientation training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PowerPoint presentation regarding expectations and policies</li> </ul>	Provide student and school personnel with Department policies and internship expectations

<b>Supervision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daily support and oversight</li> </ul>	Provide students with individual support based on individual needs/ accommodations
<b>Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals school evaluation and RIDOH survey</li> </ul>	Facilitate RIDOH Internship Program pre and post surveys as well as required school evaluations

### Evidence of Effectiveness (e.g. Evaluation Data)

Evaluation data included 21 participants, 5 (23.8%) of which responded to the evaluation questions. Of those who met, all responded 'Yes' to the questions regarding gaining workplace knowledge, gaining work skills, confidence with skills learned, feeling prepared to be more independent, and enrollment in school. None of the respondents responded "Yes" to being currently employed.

Regarding evaluation of participating Transition Academies, 4 out of 21 (19.0%) reported that the students were at least offered employment. In total, 8 (38.0%) were either currently enrolled in school or were offered a job. Among responses from the Transition Academies regarding agency collaboration, 3 reported enthusiastic support for the Internship Program and wanted to continue working with the RIDOH in the future. One respondent felt that the students would learn more under the supervision of the Health Department than other state agencies.

One confounder is that the program did not anticipate the number of students continuing education after high school. This presented a limitation for measuring employment, since, the program did not account for higher education enrollment. However, this may also be a fortunate consequence in that the Internship Program may have provided skills that led to continued education.

### Replication

To date, the RIDOH Internship Program has not been replicated in/adapted for any other state agencies in Rhode Island for the target population.

## Section II: Practice Implementation

### Internal Capacity

The personnel needed to support the program include an Internship Facilitator and Agency/Department administrative support. The Internship Facilitator is the most important and key component of the program. This person should have experience working with people with disabilities, understanding of ADA law, and knowledge of special education services and adolescent transition. Agency/Department administrative personnel provide the supervision of the Internship Facilitator and are the liaison to the Agency/Department administration. The Department administration must be willing to work the Internship Program into Department policy to facilitate participation by volunteer program personnel who accept student placement with in their programs for job tasks that match the Individual's skills.

## Collaboration/Partners

The RI Department of Health, Health Equity Institute (RIDOH, HEI) engaged stakeholders throughout the process for the development and implementation of the Internship Program primarily through the utilization of existing partnerships within the State of RI related to transition services for youth with special health care needs (YSHCN). This included: RIDOH Administration/Department Leads, other state agencies (RI Department of Education, Office of Rehabilitation Services, State Regional Transition Academies, and School Transition Programs that serve the target population.

The State Transitional Academies and School Transition Programs as the referral source help develop the intern schedule that provide school support during the internship hours based on student needs. This support includes onsite supports visits and school evaluations. The other state agencies collaborate with the RIDOH Internship Program to support development and implementation of the program as needed.

## Practice Cost

The cost of the Internship Program includes commitment of a half-time employee (minimum) for the Internship Facilitator position plus any travel costs for in/out of state trainings and in-state mileage (education meetings related to intern participants). As a result, the budget is determined by the Internship Facilitator's annual salary and the Agency/Department training requirements and mileage reimbursement rate.

## Practice Timeline

Practice Timeline				
Phase	Description of Activity	Date/Timeframe	# of hours needed to complete/oversee activity	Person(s) Responsible
Planning/ Pre-implementation	Program planning	3 months	80 hours	Facilitator and Office of Special Needs Chief
	Collaboration with respective partners for development	4 months	65 hours	Facilitator and partners
Implementation	School/student recruitment	2 months	16 hours	Facilitator and partners
	School/student interviews/selection	1 month	10 hours	Facilitator and partners
	Student shadowing/orientation	1 month	10 hours	Facilitator and partners

	Internship placement and supervision	On-going	17 hours weekly	Facilitator and partners
<b>Sustainability</b>	Evaluation to support future sustainability	On-going	N/A	N/A
	Title V Funding Support	On-going	N/A	N/A

**Resources Provided**

N/A

**Lessons Learned**

Assets of the Internship Program include: student enhanced skills development, student social skills improvement, invaluable work experience, increased agency understanding of special needs/disabilities accommodations, and inclusion promotion.

Some of the challenges experienced include the fact that the student interview process does not provide a clear picture of all of the student’s needs. As a result, it is during the internship itself that the Facilitator/participating RIDOH Program Leads become aware of the additional needs of the student which may have impacts on further needs/accommodations.

One of the lessons learned and modifications to be implemented include provision of student personal email addresses versus school emails. This resulted from the discovery that school generated emails are disconnected after the student finishes the program. In addition, the program will ensure that intern’s complete surveys during the last week of their internship to be available for evaluation purposes. In the future, RIDOH will work with Transition Academies on fostering a better relationship with parents and their understanding of the program through information facilitation as well as identifying better strategies for collecting employment data from participants.

**Next Steps**

The RIDOH will continue to implement the RIDOH Internship Program to service 3 students for 90- hours placements throughout the school year. It is anticipated that RIDOH will provide internships for 6 students during the 2018/2019 timeframe. In addition, changes are being made to integrate the program into the RIDOH Academic Center Scholars Program which provides internships for college students.

## Practice Contact Information

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