Youth served by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), and students served in Exceptional Education Programs

Employability skills and personal values are the critical tools and traits necessary for success in the workplace. These skills and values can be learned, cultivated, developed and maintained over a lifetime. The recognition of possessing these sought after skills and values is important and equally important is knowing how to include them in cover letters, resumes, and answers to interview questions during the job search process.

Traits and skills employees need to demonstrate at work are:

- **A positive attitude/motivation/ energy.** Demonstrate through words and actions.
- **Dependability/reliability/ responsibility.** Arrive at work every day, on time, ready to work, be responsible for actions and behaviors. Call ahead to explain why and always notify employer if you are unable to come to work or going to be late – explain the situation.
- **Dedication/ hard work/ good work ethics.** Exert optimal effort in successfully completing tasks. Dress appropriately, maintain good grooming and hygiene, practice good manners and always demonstrate that you take pride in yourself.
- **Honesty/integrity/ morality.** Good relationships are built on trust. Trust in what you say and what you do.
- **Self-motivation/initiative.** Work with little or no supervision. While teamwork is important so is the ability to work independently, with minimal supervision. When a task needs done do so without being told.
- **Willingness to learn.** Always be willing to learn new skills and/or techniques. Be open to grow and learn with change as jobs are constantly changing and evolving.
- **Adaptability/ flexibility.** While being open to new ideas and concepts this also means adapting to the personality and work habits of co-workers and supervisors.

**Summary:** Youth needs to understand what the desired skills are that employers are looking for: **Hard skills** - particular skills, qualifications, and certifications that the job requires and **Success Skills** - attitude, adaptability, team player, etc.

**What should youth avoid at all cost:**

- **Unreliability** — such as excessive tardiness, absenteeism, and/or not showing up as well as poor attendance at work
• **Negative behaviors and attitude** - inability to get along with other workers and/or supervisor
• **Poor work performance** - unable to do the work, works too slowly and too many mistakes, uses work time for personal business
• **Abuse of alcohol and/or drugs**, even to the extent that use the night before impedes performance during the day
• **Exhibit violent behaviors and/or rudeness, poor temperament, a negative attitude, aloof behavior and/or poor relationships with customers and/or co-workers**
• **Dishonesty** – lie and/or steal and/or false documentation on time sheets or as part of work assignments, failure to adequately complete a job application. If a youth has a prior criminal arrest, it is suggested a note be written on the application, “Would like to discuss,” as many employers do not differentiate between a youth’s adjudication of guilt or adult conviction, which may make a difference in an employment decision.
• **Inappropriate dressing and/or grooming or negative hygiene.**
• **Not following safety rules** – too many accidents, carelessness, sloppiness, leaving trash, not replacing equipment, etc.

The term Employability Skills Training conjures up a series of different interpretations. A comprehensive Employability Skills Training program teaches the knowledge and skills necessary for job search as well as promoting the attitudes and strategies essential for job retention and career advancement.

An effective Employability Skills Training Program would be a model of the Cooperative Education (CE) Programs provided by school districts - most familiar is the Diversified Cooperative Education (DCT) Program. The CE/DCT programs include classroom training (curriculum), assistance with job search/placement, and on-the-job training and support as needed to help youth maintain employment.

There are various Cooperative Education Programs throughout the state of Florida (as well as nationally) such as Agriculture Cooperative Education (ACE), Business Cooperative Education (BCE), Cooperative Education (CE), Distributive Education (DE), Diversified Cooperative Training (DCT), etc.

Leon’s Intensive Training for Employment Program (LITE) is a comprehensive four-year career development program for secondary exceptional education students in Leon County, Florida. It is a cooperative vocational education program for students with special needs requiring short term training and support needs as well as for students who need more intensive training and ongoing supports. This program was modeled after the DCT Program in the mid 1980’s soon becoming a national exemplary model for employability skills training and placing special needs youth in the job market. This program continues to remain exemplary in the career development process of this targeted population. *(See Appendix, Section A for additional information pertaining to the LITE program as well as other cooperative education models for Exceptional Education Students.)*


**Cooperative Education Programs include:**

• School or Community-Based Care Lead Agencies administrative support
Components of a Cooperative Education Program consist of:

- **Classroom training:**
  - Employability skills includes but are not limited to –
    - The job search (planning the search)
    - Applying for a job (preparing)
    - Interviewing for a job (getting organized)
    - Good work habits (importance of keeping a job)
    - Getting along on the job (effective communication)
    - Getting ahead (steps for advancing)
    - Work ethics integrated into ALL topics as well as standalone training
    - Personal finances.

- **On the Job Training and Support:**
  - Adequate safety instruction
  - A challenging job for the student’s ability and purpose
  - Work that is related to the student’s career and occupational choice
  - Job duties and tasks which develop responsibility
  - The job provides an adequate amount of work to keep the student busy
  - A sequential order of job mastery skills
  - A salary that is paid in conformity with federal and state laws.
  - Supervised on-the-job training, governed by a training agreement and an individualized training plan, signed by the student, teacher/coordinator/trainer, employer, and parent/guardian.
  - The training plan is to include instructional objectives and a list of on-the-job and in-school learning experiences.
  - The student must be paid for work performed.
  - The employer will have access to the teacher/trainer/coordinator to assist with any work related problems that may arise.

Employability preparedness involves the competencies of providing career guidance, teaching employability skills, assisting the youth with job placement and on-going support to ensure employment sustainability, as well as fostering a business community partnership. On-going contact with the youth assures that they continue to receive organized and current information about work values, ethics, the
importance of positive attitudes and employer expectations, Child Labor Laws (age appropriate), Federal Wage, Civil Rights Legislation, and Hour Laws and any other pertinent resources and information. If the youth is not in a Cooperative Education Program, a parent, mentor, counselor or designated case manager should assume as many of these responsibilities as possible to support the initial employment experience of a youth lacking a traditional support system.

A result of teaching intense work ethics skills is that it is a winning proposition for all concerned. The youth begin employment with positive work ethic skills, which will enhance their value as employees; instructors develop more motivated and attentive students; and employers acquire employees with desirable work habits.

Many employers will “cooperate” and provide their companies safety manuals, employee handbooks, mission statements, and expertise for creating lessons that are current and practical for students and teacher/coordinators in their communities

While the Cooperative Education Model combines classroom instruction and on-the-job training there are many other Work Experience, Work Based and Job Exploration programs that are implemented in schools throughout the state of Florida. Any of these programs (below) could be replicated at Community-Based Care Lead Agencies. Reference www.fldoe.org/workforce/programs/doc/coopm.doc

**SPECIAL NOTE:**

It is important to note that there is a difference between "cooperative education programs" (as described in the Cooperative Education Advantage in Florida manual) and the "cooperative education methodology" as it is used in general conversation.

The "cooperative education methodology" has become a generic term for any type or form of work-site experience for a student, including (but not limited to):

- On-the-Job Training (OJT)
- Externships
- Internships
- Executive Internships
- Fellowships
- Job Shadowing
- Job Mentoring
- Cooperative Education
- Work-Based learning
- Work Experience
- Apprenticeships
- Youth Apprenticeships
- Pre-Apprenticeships
- Etc.

The cooperative education programs are also mentioned in an Agency for Workforce Intervention (AWI) document (www.floridajobs.org/workforce/WIA_QA_Answers.html) that addresses services available through the Workforce Investment Act, Quick Questions About Key Elements of the Workforce Investment Act:

**Services available in training according to the AWI document are as follows:**

Adult and dislocated workers who do not obtain employment following intensive services may be referred to training in order for these individuals to secure employment. The training must be directly linked to occupations in demand in the area or another area if the individual is willing to relocate. A WIA Status Change will be completed and key entered in the MIS to enroll these individuals into training.

The following are examples of allowable training:

- Occupational skills training including training for nontraditional employment
- On-the-job training
- Programs that combine workplace training with related instruction, which may include cooperative education programs
- Private sector training programs
- Skill upgrading and retraining
- Entrepreneurial training
- Job readiness training
- Adult education and literacy activities provided in combination with training
- Customized training

*(Reference: WIA section 134(d) 4(D) and Consultation Paper on Performance Accountability Measurement for the WI System under Title I of the WIA, II, B and Table 1.)*

**CURRENT LEVELS OF INFRASTRUCTURE**

Regarding the current level of infrastructure in the delivery of employability skills training to foster care youth may constitute yet another responsibility of the Independent Living Specialist. The Independent Living Specialist is required to teach a Life Skills curriculum, which does include employability skills training. However the frequency of the employability skills training is often taught as little as once a month. There appears to be little involvement with the business community as far as providing expertise to serve as resource speakers and/or providing specific skills training, i.e. perfecting interviewing skills, etc.

Some Community-Based Care Lead Agencies allocate funding for an Education Advocate whose responsibility it is to serve as a liaison with their local school system and the Independent Living Specialist/Case Managers as well as effectively utilizing the expertise of the business community in providing employability skills training, such as the Big Bend Community Based Center *(Tallahassee)*, Community Based Care of Seminole *(Sanford)*, and the Family Support Services *(Jacksonville).*
Workforce development services in Florida are available primarily through a system of nearly 100 One-Stop Centers, which are designed to provide easy access to diverse services including employability skills training and job placement, temporary cash assistance and special support services such as subsidized childcare and transportation. Independent Living Specialist/Case Managers can refer their youth to the One-Stop Centers for a variety of employability skills training services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations may result in increased effectiveness of employability skills training program for youth served by the Department of Children and Family Services.

- Collaborate with stakeholders in DCF, DOE, DJJ, CBC, and representatives from the business community to design and implement a pilot program modeling the Cooperative Education Programs, which could possibly be delivered at Community-Based Care Lead Agencies.
  - Utilize knowledge and services of foster care contacts that have been identified by DOE and DCF (See Appendix, Section B for recommended services of the foster care liaisons) Reference “Tool Kit” [www.centerforchildwelfare.org](http://www.centerforchildwelfare.org) for a list of the DCF and DOE foster care liaisons
  - Foster Care Contacts and Independent Living Specialists/Case Managers or other identified staff such as an Educational Advocate should meet on a regular basis to assure knowledge and dissemination of information pertaining to the services and programs available for foster care youth, specifically related to:
    - Career awareness, exploration, preparation programs (Reference CHOICES in the“Tool Kit” [www.centerforchildwelfare.org](http://www.centerforchildwelfare.org))
    - Cooperative education and other work based programs utilizing the cooperative education methodology ([www.fldoe.org/workforce/programs/doc/coopm.doc](http://www.fldoe.org/workforce/programs/doc/coopm.doc))
- Consider training an Educational and Employability Advocate for identified youth to actively participate in employability skills training class modeling the cooperative education programs and/or with designated person that will serve as an Employment Coordinator or Service Provider such as regional workforce board/one stop centers/school district personnel.
- It is crucial that both the youth and employer receive the necessary training and support to assure successful employment of a special needs youth. The importance of a youth’s successful transition to the “world of work” is equally important to the business community who are hiring the youth – the employers – both in the private and public sector. Often young, inexperienced, and immature workers require additional training, time, and supervision. Therefore, providing support to the employers who hire these youth is vital to keep the doors to work opportunities.
- A collaborative effort with the Agency for Workforce Intervention (AWI), Department of Children and Family Service (DCF), Department of Education (DOE), representatives of the business community, and other stakeholders to review the services state involved youth receive. The data collected from this study could be used to improve the delivery and type of services from the One Stop Centers/Regional Workforce Boards and could include (but not limited to) the following:
  - number of youth receiving services
- name, age, address, phone numbers, e-mail addresses
- service received
- how many different services received
- number of youth placed on jobs
- sustainability on the job
- number returning to One-Stop Centers for additional services.
- Review Broward School District’s policy regarding the identification of foster care youth as they enter the school system to see if this policy should be promoted as a “best practice” to other school districts throughout the state.

Suggested resources/materials for **Success at Work: Tips for Employability of Youth with Special Needs**: Youth served by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), and students served in Exceptional Education Programs can be found in the Appendix, and/or a “Tool Kit” document, which can be accessed on the University of South Florida web site: [www.centerforchildwelfare.org](http://www.centerforchildwelfare.org)