



YOUTH SERVICE PROFESSIONALS' (YSP) KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, & ABILITIES (KSA)

The Values of the Field

Youth Service Professionals (YSP) are adults who work with young people (ages 14 – 25) in a variety of settings as they transition to continued education, work, and independent living. The term “youth service professional” was purposefully selected to include and unite professionals working with youth across systems and settings, such as education, job training, juvenile justice, human services, foster care, vocational rehabilitation, and recreation. Regardless of the setting, YSPs empower youth to attain economic self-sufficiency. They deliver a widely varying set of opportunities, supports, and services working in partnership with a diverse population of young people. For the YSP, a fundamental knowledge of youth development is essential; they must recognize and address the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and behavioral transformations of adolescence. Successful YSPs demonstrate professionalism at all times. YSPs also must understand their position and responsibilities within their own field, make connections between their work with other systems and populations, and demonstrate knowledge of the rights of young people and the laws that ensure those rights.

Therefore, in working with young people, YSPs commit to:

- Respect human rights and dignity;
- Ensure the integrity of all professional relationships;
- Empower young people to make their own choices and advocate for their own interests;
- Emphasize young people’s strengths;
- Serve young people holistically; and
- Advocate for fair and quality provision of services.

To assist YSPs in their work, each Youth Service Professionals' Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (YSP/KSA) module assumes that high-quality opportunities and services for young people will ensure:

- High expectations for all youth;
- Equality of opportunity for everyone, including nondiscrimination, individualization, and inclusion and integration;
- Full participation through self-determination, informed choice, and participation and support in decision making;
- Independent living, including skill development and access to long term supports and services;
- Competitive integrated employment and economic self-sufficiency, which may include supports; and
- An individualized, person-driven, trauma-informed, and culturally and linguistically competent approach.

History of the YSP/KSAs

The Youth Service Professionals' Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (YSP/KSA) capture the knowledge, skills and abilities needed by Youth Service Professionals (YSP) to exhibit the values described above and support young people's journey to employment.

The YSP/KSAs were initially developed in 2003 by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth), in partnership with the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) and the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC). The KSAs were compiled from a review of over 70 initiatives offering training or identifying competencies for the fields of youth development, workforce development, education, and disability services. They were validated by youth service professionals, program managers, and other stakeholders from the field through focus groups, conference calls, meetings, and an online questionnaire of relevancy, proficiency, and available training.

The YSP/KSAs were updated in 2018-19 by the RSA Vocational Rehabilitation Youth Technical Assistance Center (Y-TAC), again in partnership with IEL and NYEC. A national group of YSP/KSA users and trainers reviewed and revised the KSA competencies to reflect the most recent information and developments in the youth service field. The competencies are grouped into ten Competency Areas.

The YSP/KSA Competency Areas are intended to work together, and to be relevant to the work of front-line staff and leaders alike. Given NCWD/Youth's historic focus, each Competency Area contains baseline competencies for all youth, as well as additional competencies for youth service professionals working with youth with disabilities. The 2018-19 update adds two new components: 1) responding to demand for more differentiation in the competencies, a new set of competencies that exemplary youth service professionals demonstrate; and 2) a new, overarching Competency Area that includes themes intended to be infused throughout the modules or other trainings, such as trauma-informed practices and disability awareness.

Overarching Competency Area: Inclusion and Safety of All Youth

KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve All Youth include:	Additional KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve Youth w/Disabilities include:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to apply universal design principles, including accommodations 2. Ability to create safe and welcoming environments for all youth, especially historically marginalized populations 3. Ability to apply a trauma-informed lens to work with youth 4. Ability to apply professional ethics throughout practice 5. Understanding of how intergenerational poverty affects youth, their families, and communities 6. Ability to recognize unconscious bias and apply racial mindfulness skills 7. Understanding of cultural implications of service provision and roles of youth and families 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Understanding of guardianship, supported decision making and informed choice to ensure youth with disabilities fully participate in their planning 9. Understanding of communication, standards, and practices within disability groups 10. Knowledge of the disability rights movement and disability awareness

Competency Area #1: Advancing the Youth Service Field

KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve All Youth include:	Additional KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve Youth with Disabilities include:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to apply youth development theory, such as prolonged adolescence and brain science, to their work 2. Understanding of youth cultural competence, community context, and key rules relating to youth employment (e.g., labor, compulsory school attendance) 3. Knowledge of the role of the youth service professional, including professional ethics and boundaries, confidentiality, and professional development needs and opportunities 4. Working knowledge of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including topics such as common performance measures 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Understanding of the values of and changes in the disability field, such as presumed competence, inclusion, and employment first 6. Understanding of disability laws including Sections 504 and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA), and new Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) final rule 7. Knowledge of key concepts and processes, including Individualized Education Program (IEP), Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), transition, due process procedures, parents' rights, informed choice, self-determination, universal access, and reasonable accommodations 8. Understanding of privacy and confidentiality rights as they relate to disability disclosure 9. Understanding models of adult services that support youth in the transition process

Competency Area #2: Communicating Effectively with Youth

KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve All Youth include:	Additional KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve Youth with Disabilities include:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstration of high expectations and respect for all youth, including the ability to be open minded and nonjudgmental 2. Ability to develop trusting relationships with youth 3. Ability to communicate with youth in a culturally competent manner, including through social media or other modes 4. Ability to cultivate awareness of diversity and youth culture 5. Ability to recognize and address needs for intervention (e.g., drug or alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, and depression) using a trauma-informed lens 6. Ability to advocate for, motivate, recruit, and engage youth 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Knowledge of issues and trends affecting youth with disabilities (e.g. low expectations, attitudinal or environmental barriers, need for community and social integration) 8. Understanding of disability awareness and role of culture in rehabilitation practices 9. Understanding of how to communicate with youth with various physical, sensory, psychiatric, and cognitive disabilities 10. Understanding of ethics relating to the use of social media and electronic methods for practice and/or communication

Competency Area #3: Assessment & Individualized Planning

KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve All Youth include:	Additional KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve Youth with Disabilities include:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to facilitate individualized planning, including the ability to gather information on goals, interests, past experience, learning styles, academic progress, independent living skills, and needs (e.g., transportation, child care, housing, health care) 2. Ability to involve youth in their own planning process, set realistic goals, make informed choices, and exercise self-determination and self-advocacy 3. Ability to engage key stakeholders, such as family and caring adults, in planning 4. Knowledge of various assessment tools and strategies and ability to administer assessments (or make referrals, as needed) 5. Ability to track progress and change plans as needed 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Ability to appropriately gather information on young peoples' gifts, assets, and transferable skills 7. Recognize implications of assessment for education and employment, including any identification of strengths, and potential need for accommodations or assistive technology 8. Ability to gather information regarding independent living skills and needs, including accommodations and supports 9. Understanding of benefits planning, including Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and health benefits and their relation to employment 10. Ability to gather information on employment readiness 11. Ability to articulate assessment findings in an oral or written format 12. Ability to use findings to develop vocational profile and plan

Competency Area #4: Strengthening Relationships with Family and Community

KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve All Youth include:	Additional KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve Youth with Disabilities include:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to build relationships with family members or other significant persons in the lives of youth; recognizing diversity of families 2. Ability to work with families on release of information 3. Ability to identify and remediate unique barriers for underprivileged families 4. Ability to integrate financial empowerment into efforts with youth and families 5. Ability to resource-map and connect youth to community institutions, resources, and supportive adults 6. Ability to engage youth in civic engagement and leadership activities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Ability to involve families, guardians, and advocates including connections to disability-specific resources and groups 8. Ability to support families to achieve high expectations for young people, including competitive integrated employment 9. Ability to help young people navigate and understand the Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits system 10. Understanding of community resources, including disability-specific resources and understanding the roles of siblings

Competency Area #5: Career Preparation and Exploration

KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve All Youth include:	Additional KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve Youth with Disabilities include:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge of career coaching techniques, career interest analysis, and career planning 2. Knowledge of tools and processes to identify skills and education required for particular career pathways 3. Knowledge of and ability to connect young people to career awareness and exploration activities, such as informational interviews, job shadows, and internships 4. Knowledge of workplace and labor market trends 5. Ability to prepare youth for, and connect them to, work-based learning, post-secondary education, and training opportunities related to their career interests and skills 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Knowledge of employment options for youth with disabilities, such as supported employment, customized employment, or self-employment 7. Understanding of the roles of job site natural supports and mentors on career development and advancement

Competency Area #6: Securing Resources and Connecting Across Systems	
KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve All Youth include:	Additional KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve Youth with Disabilities include:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to identify and refer to a range of community resources (people, places, and things) that can assist youth 2. Ability to create and build collaborative relationships and manage partnerships 3. Ability to market programs as valuable partners and resources to the community 4. Knowledge of different funding streams for youth services 5. Understanding of strategies for braiding or combining funds to maximize services for youth 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Knowledge of other organizations that may assist with disability-specific supports and workforce preparation 7. Fostering connections to Employment Networks, or creating Employment Networks 8. Ability to access disability-specific supports, such as assistive technology and accommodations 9. Ability to access resources from disability-specific programs, such as special education, vocational rehabilitation, community rehabilitation programs, disability income support work incentives, and other programs
Competency Area #7: Relationships with Businesses	
KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve All Youth include:	Additional KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve Youth with Disabilities include:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to communicate effectively with businesses 2. Ability to understand business needs, develop reciprocal relationships, and participate in networks (such as chambers of commerce) 3. Ability to support businesses in working effectively with young employees 4. Ability to involve businesses in career exploration, workforce preparation, and other areas of program design and delivery 5. Ability to mediate and resolve conflicts on the job between young people and businesses 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Ability to identify, recruit, and provide support to businesses who hire youth with disabilities 7. Ability to support youth to communicate directly with businesses during the job search process 8. Ability to advocate for youth with disabilities with businesses including negotiating job design and job customization 9. Ability to train businesses and their staff in how to work with and support young people, including disability awareness training, information about universal access and design, reasonable accommodations, and auxiliary aids and services

Competency Area #8: Quality Program Implementation

KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve All Youth include:	Additional KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve Youth with Disabilities include:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to facilitate groups 2. Ability to develop youth leadership and teamwork skills 3. Understanding of program design 4. Understanding of program performance measures and how these demonstrate impact 5. Ability to collect and analyze program data and use it for program improvement and decision making 6. Ability to apply professional ethics throughout program design and delivery 7. Ability to develop and manage project budgets 8. Ability to communicate effectively about the program to stakeholders, including policymakers, funders, and partners 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Ability to transform historically adult designed services to meet the needs of youth 10. Ability to design staff development plans to lead to competent, efficient, and ethically driven Youth Service Professionals (YSPs)

Competency Area #9: Preparing Youth for the Workforce

KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve All Youth include:	Additional KSAs Needed to Effectively Serve Youth with Disabilities include:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to build young people’s employability skills such as adaptability, teamwork, and navigating workplace landscape (including using different registers of language) 2. Ability to enhance young people's self-advocacy skills 3. Ability to integrate use of technology (such as social media) into job searches 4. Ability to provide follow-up services, including support of job and post-secondary retention 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Ability to conduct job matching and customizing, with or on behalf of youth with disabilities, including accommodations, supports and modifications 6. Knowledge of supports youth may require on jobs, including what employers need to know about reasonable accommodations, assistive technology, funding streams, and tax incentives 7. Knowledge of workforce and vocational rehabilitation services and supports available to engage youth in pre-employment training



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