



Children's Services Council

of Broward County

Our Focus is Our Children.

For students who have learning disabilities, transitioning into adulthood can be difficult for them and their families. To help prepare Broward County youth and their families prepare for this transition, the T2I Special Needs Advisory Coalition, a subcommittee of Children's Services Council of Broward County's Children's Strategic Plan, hosted the Teens' Transition to Life Summit on Sept. 23 at the Fort Lauderdale Marriott North Hotel.

Carl Dasse, community systems administrator at CSC Broward, urged for parents to be involved with their children's post-high school plans.

"Even though they may be between the ages of 14 and 21, they're still young people and they don't have a lot of experiences," he said. "They need the help and the guidance of a caring adult to give them direction whether they have a disability or not."

The eighth annual summit provided information about college, vocational education and other options for post-high school graduation. Russell Lehmann, an award-winning public speaker, author, poet and autism awareness advocate — who has autism — spoke at the free event. He discussed how he does not let his autism control his endeavors and encouraged others to do the same.

After his motivational speech during the opening session of the event, children and parents parted ways to attend youth-focused and parent-focused workshops.

Youth workshops covered creative relaxation, self-management, financial education, relationships and self-determination, stigmas and labels, and question-and-answer panels about soft skills needed for employment, disabilities and student employment. Parent workshops discussed deferment/diploma options, the importance of family empowerment, creative relaxation, a growth mindset, available services for behavioral and emotional problems, and question-and-answer panels about housing and independent living, post-grad options, employment training and services provided by the Social Security Administration and Vocational Rehabilitation of Florida.

Following a courtesy lunch, children attended a summit after-party where Stichiz and DJ Ivory from iHeart Radio provided entertainment while parents attended a final workshop about programs available for their children.

Dasse explained that the summit is an important resource for individuals with special needs and their families because attempting to navigate the information and opportunities can be an arduous process. The Special Needs Advisory Coalition discovered that an alarming number of youth with disabilities would not pursue helpful programs, higher education or employment because they did not know about assistance opportunities. Dasse explained that this lack of knowledge created a low educational and workforce success rate for special needs students and that with the summit, CSC Broward hopes to encourage these individuals to further pursue opportunities.

The U.S. Department of Education reported that in the 2014-15 academic year, only 64.6 percent of U.S. students with disabilities graduated from high school, which is 18.6 percent lower than the national average for non-disabled students. In Florida, the rate was worse for disabled students at only 56.8 percent. While the national average saw a slight increase since 2010 of about 5 percent, the situation is different for Native Americans.

In 2015, the number of Native American or Alaska Native 16- to 20-year-olds who reported a disability was higher than the national average, according to the American Community Survey. While the national average was 6.9 percent for all races, Native Americans were at 8.6 percent nationally, and that number was more than doubled for those in Florida. Furthermore, only 30.5 percent of Native American or Alaska Native adults with disabilities were employed, which is 5

percent lower than the national average for that year.

The number of reportedly disabled Native Americans and Alaska Natives showed an overall increase since 2010 and the employment rate for those individuals has remained the same.

Dasse said that the graduation and employment rates could increase if programs and opportunities were laid out better for special needs individuals and their caregivers. With the Transition to Adulthood Summit, Tribal and Broward community members have better access to this information, as approximately 30 vendors attended to provide information about their service and products for special needs individuals.

“The unemployment rate in the post-secondary achievement level for youth with disabilities is significantly lower than the general population as a whole,” he said. “Because of that, you really have to make an effort to educate these young people and also their parents about the opportunities that do exist.”

The Special Needs Advisory Coalition plans to continue holding the summit and other programs to assist the community. More information can be found on the CSC Broward website at cscbroward.org.

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