

Workshops

Access Day: Creating a College Experience, Burlington Core Team Members

What if a student's first experience with college could happen before they graduate from high school?

Burlington HireAbility, schools, and Community College of Vermont (CCV) teamed up to create an Access Day, giving students and families an opportunity to experience college, ask questions, and begin seeing themselves as college students.

In this interactive session, the Burlington team will walk through what they did, what they learned, and how transition core teams can create a similar opportunity in their own communities.

Most importantly, attendees will consider: What first opportunity can we create to help a student explore college, make an informed choice, and take their next step?

Come ready to identify your own first step toward implementing an Access Day or similar college-access experience in your area.

The Skills They Already Have: Shifting Mindsets About Youth Readiness, Katie O'Shea, VT Afterschool

Too often, the focus is on whether young people are "ready" for what comes next. This workshop challenges that mindset by exploring how youth are already developing skills, strengths, and experiences that prepare them for the future. Participants will learn how to recognize those skills, support youth in naming their strengths, and create opportunities for young people to continue growing. You will leave with ready-to-use resources to help youth shift their own mindset, recognize the skills they are already building, and see how those strengths connect to future opportunities.

The First Step Towards Employment and Career Exploration with HireAbility, Katie Coe & Nat Piper

Every employment journey starts somewhere, a first conversation with an employer, a first opportunity to explore a career, a first workplace experience, or a first step toward a job goal. In this conversational workshop, we'll explore how Business Account Managers and HireAbility's employer partnerships can help create those first steps.

Together, we'll connect career exploration, progressive employment, and other HireAbility resources to the opportunities they make possible for job seekers. We'll look at how we can use these tools and relationships intentionally to create experiences that help someone discover their strengths, build skills, and see what might be possible.

Workshops

Attendees will leave challenged to identify one “first” they can help create and one action they will take to make it happen.

Panel: Building Systems That Work Together

Supporting youth and families often requires navigating multiple systems, agencies, and services. This panel brings together system partners and problem-solvers to explore how organizations can better align efforts, clarify roles, and strengthen collaboration. Hear real-world examples of what happens when systems work together and when gaps create barriers. Facilitated with youth voice at the center, this conversation will highlight practical strategies, resources, and lessons learned for professionals working across education, employment, health, mental health, and community services.

Education & Transition Planning, John Spinney and Jayson Capobianco

This workshop will explore effective transition planning practices that help students prepare for life after high school. Participants will learn about IDEA requirements, evidence-based approaches, and statewide transition outcomes, including Indicator 13 and 14 data. The session will highlight strategies for implementing meaningful transition plans, strengthening collaboration, and supporting successful post-school outcomes for students.

The First Time I Spoke Up: Creating Firsts That Build Self-Advocacy, Green Mountain Self Advocates

High school is full of important “firsts” for students with disabilities. The first time I spoke at my IEP meeting. The first time someone asked me what I want for my future. The first time I asked for an accommodation. The first time I disagreed with a decision. The first time I said, “I want to try this myself.”

These moments can build confidence and self-advocacy skills that last long after graduation. But sometimes, with the best intentions, adults step in too quickly, speak for students, or protect them from experiences that could help them learn and grow.

In this interactive workshop, Green Mountain Self-Advocates (GMSA) Peer Trainers will share their lived experiences of learning to speak up, make choices, take risks, make mistakes, and advocate for themselves. Together, Peer Trainers will explore how educators and counselors can recognize everyday opportunities for students to practice self-advocacy, before they leave school and are expected to do it on their own.

Workshops

Participants will leave with practical strategies they can use to create more opportunities for students to have a voice, make real choices, try new things, and take the lead in decisions about their own lives.

Partnering with Families: Moving from “Doing For” to “Supporting With”, Vermont Family Network

Families are essential partners in a young person’s transition, but professionals can sometimes struggle to balance family involvement with keeping the young person’s goals, preferences, and voice at the center. Join Vermont Family Network (VFN) Family Support staff for an interactive session focusing on how professionals can build stronger partnerships with parents/caregivers while supporting youth autonomy at the same time.