

Beyond the Checklist: Student-Centered Advocacy in Action

Presented by: Danielle Bentley, Simone Cravatta, and Teagan Lobdell

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Danielle Bentley

Futures Coordinator, Disability EmpowHer Network

- Former educator and transition specialist
- Coordinates Empowered Futures, a Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program
- Supports youth and young adults with disabilities in career exploration, self-advocacy, workplace readiness, post-secondary planning, and work-based learning experiences
- Represents Disability EmpowHer Network, a nonprofit organization run by and for girls and women with disabilities



Co-Presenters

Simone Cravatta

- Empowered Futures Pre-ETS participant
- Disability advocate and self-advocate
- Student leader navigating the transition to college and employment

Teagan Lobdell

- Empowered Futures Pre-ETS participant
- Self-advocate and emerging leader
- Actively building skills in employment, independence, and community engagement



Workshop Overview

This workshop explores how a student-centered, holistic approach to Pre-ETS and transition services can be delivered within Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) standards while still prioritizing youth voice, strengths, and goals. Participants will learn practical strategies to move beyond compliance-based services and toward meaningful, individualized support that increases engagement and improves outcomes for youth with disabilities.

Through real examples, youth co-presenters, and interactive activities, attendees will examine how to align VR deliverables with what students truly need to succeed in school, work, and independent living.



Disability EmpowHer Network

Our Mission

Empowering girls and women with disabilities through mentoring, leadership development, self-advocacy, and transformational learning experiences.

Who We Are

- A nonprofit organization run by and for women with disabilities
- Serving youth and adults across New York State
- Committed to increasing independence, confidence, community engagement, and employment outcomes

Our Vision

A world where girls and women with disabilities are empowered to lead, advocate, and thrive in their communities.



Simone's Story



Teagan's Story



ACCES-VR Standards for Self-Advocacy Skills:

- Understanding one's disability
- Disclosure of disability
- Decision-making and problem solving
- Safe and responsible use of social media and the internet
- Goal setting
- Self-awareness and independent living skills
- Disability accommodations
- How to request and utilize accommodations



ACCES-VR Standards for Self-Advocacy Skills:

- Understanding work cultures and how to adapt to varying cultures
- Self-determination skills
- How to request and accept help
- Identifying intrinsic strengths and capabilities
- How to take a leadership role in support plans
- Assertiveness skills
- Understanding of your civil rights
- Understanding the value of listening to feedback from others



ACCES-VR Standards for Self-Advocacy Skills:

- Developing positive self-talk skills and understanding the value of and when to utilize those skills
- Connecting with peers and the value of peer-mentoring
- Learning about different services in the community and how to apply for services
- Understanding your rights and responsibilities



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