



The Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program: Facilitating Transition to Success

Pennsylvania Transition Conference

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Introductions

Presenters

- **Kylie Pilot**, University of Pittsburgh
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- **Tommy Johns**, Hiram G. Andrews Center

Audience

- OVR Counselors?
- Educators?
- Parents?
- Students?
- Other?

Learning Objectives

At the end of this session, attendees will be able to:

1. Describe the structure, goals and population served by the Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program (CSEP).
2. Explain the rationale behind program enhancements designed to facilitate emotion regulation, social skills and community engagement.
3. Experience emotion regulation and social skills interventions, including meditation and a PEERS[®] session.

Overview

- I. Hiram G. Andrews Center & Collaboration with Pitt
- II. Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program (CSEP) overview
- III. CSEP interventions
 - I. Emotion regulation
 - II. Social skills
 - III. Community engagement
- IV. Clinical pathways
- V. Wrap-up & questions



Hiram G. Andrews Center

Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC)

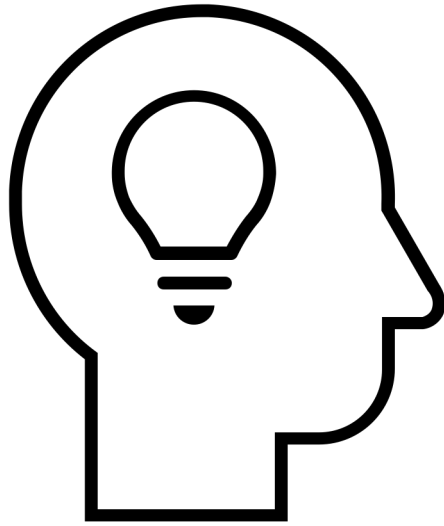
- Opened in April 1959.
- World's first and largest vocational rehabilitation facility specially designed to provide comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services under one roof.
- Only self-supporting government facility in Pennsylvania.



Location

- Located in suburban Johnstown, PA.
- Covers more than 45 acres (12 acres under one roof; barrier-free).

Mission Statement



- To offer quality individualized post-secondary education, pre-employment transition and support services to customers as they determine and pursue individualized goals of employment and independence.

Services

- Pre-Employment Transition Services
 - Center for Occupational Readiness (COR)
 - Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program (CSEP)
 - Special Academies
 - One Day Experiences
- Evaluation
- Support Services
 - Allied Health Services
 - Wellness Center
 - Physical Therapy
 - Occupational Therapy
 - Speech Therapy
 - Therapeutic Services
 - Center for Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (CART)
 - Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling
 - Deaf/Hard of Hearing Services
 - Services for Students with Visual Impairments
 - Disability Support Services
 - Academic Support Programs
 - Career Guidance Center

Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) Programs

- **Associate in Specialized Business**

- ASB Medical Office Assistant

- **Associate in Specialized Technology**

- AST Culinary Arts
- AST Networking Technology

- **Diploma**

- Automotive Technology
- Building Maintenance
- Culinary Assistant
- Materials Management and Distribution
- Nurse Aide
- Administrative Assistant
- Welding Technology

Collaboration Between HGAC and Pitt

- Pitt faculty, staff and MS-level students are contracted to develop, implement and operate clinical programs located within HGAC.
 - 1993 – HGAC and state VR sought to develop a capability in Assistive Technology.
 - 2000 – HGAC realized that customers with neurocognitive disabilities (NCD) were less likely to graduate from prevocational training programs than customers without NCD. Added cognitive disability and rehabilitation psychology focus.
- This ongoing contract allows HGAC to provide unique and comprehensive clinical services to young adults with NCD transitioning to postsecondary education.
- Partnership supports flexible responses to rapidly changing needs, barriers and priorities from all stakeholders (e.g., Pitt, HGAC, customers).



Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program

Population

- Typical diagnoses:
 - Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - Specific Learning Disabilities
 - Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
 - And/or Other Acquired Cognitive Disorders (e.g., Traumatic Brain Injury).
- Participants are often referred to CSEP due to:
 - Limited self-awareness and understanding of the impact of disability.
 - Difficulty establishing and maintaining reciprocal social relationships.
 - Poor emotional regulation and impulse control.
 - Other executive functioning impairments.
- Most participants experience cognitive inflexibility, intolerance of uncertainty and change, and difficulty generalizing learning.

Goals

1. Identify strengths, weaknesses and obstacles to goal attainment.
2. Determine realistic expectations and goals.
3. Identify and use strategies and accommodations to address obstacles.
4. Develop self-advocacy and empowerment skills.

Tier Organization

Tier I

- Individuals who are currently participating in the full-time term-long CSEP program

Tier II

- Follow-up services for individuals who completed Tier I and are enrolled in a CTI at HGAC training program

Tier III

- Eligible students who are enrolled in a CTI training program but did not participate in Tier I are evaluated and/or participate in cognitive rehabilitation in combination with their training program.

Screening and Eligibility

Tier I

- Participants are screened for CSEP eligibility via a review of records and an interview.
- Individuals who meet criteria for CSEP demonstrate:
 - Evidence that cognitive impairments are contributing to functional impairment.
 - Adequate verbal functioning and abstract reasoning to allow participation in group treatment.
 - Expression of understanding of and willingness to participate in the program.

CSEP Tier I

- 15-weeks
- Full time (Monday-Friday, 8:00am-3:30pm)
- Therapy program designed for customers with cognitive disabilities
- Enrollment limited to 15 resident-only participants

Overview of Daily Schedule

CSEP Tier I Weekly Schedule					
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:15 AM	Daily Organization & Planning	Daily Organization & Planning	Daily Organization & Planning	Daily Organization & Planning	Daily Organization & Planning
8:30 AM	Morning Meditation	Morning Meditation	Individual Sessions/ Independent Work Time	Morning Meditation	Morning Meditation
9:00 AM	Vocational Group	PEERS Social Skill Lesson and Homework Review		Vocational Group	Know Your Disability Group (KYDG)
10:00 AM	Teamwork Group			Teamwork Group	Review Activity
11:00 AM					
11:15 AM	Lunch Break	Lunch Break	Lunch Break	Lunch Break	Lunch Break
12:00 PM					
1:00 PM	Project Planning/ Independent Work Time	PEERS Social Skills Behavioral Rehearsal (Practice)	Individual Sessions/ Independent Work Time	Project Planning/ Independent Work Time	Community Engagement
2:00 PM	Afternoon Meditation			Afternoon Meditation	
2:30 PM		Afternoon Meditation			Afternoon Meditation
3:00 PM	Dismissal/Staff Supervision	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal/ Staff Supervision	Dismissal
3:30 PM					

CSEP Tier II

- **Mission:**
 - Continue to support the use of strategies and accommodations that were identified in Tier I.
 - Assist in the development of strategies and accommodations that are specific to the training and job goal the student is receiving.
- Services are based on student needs.

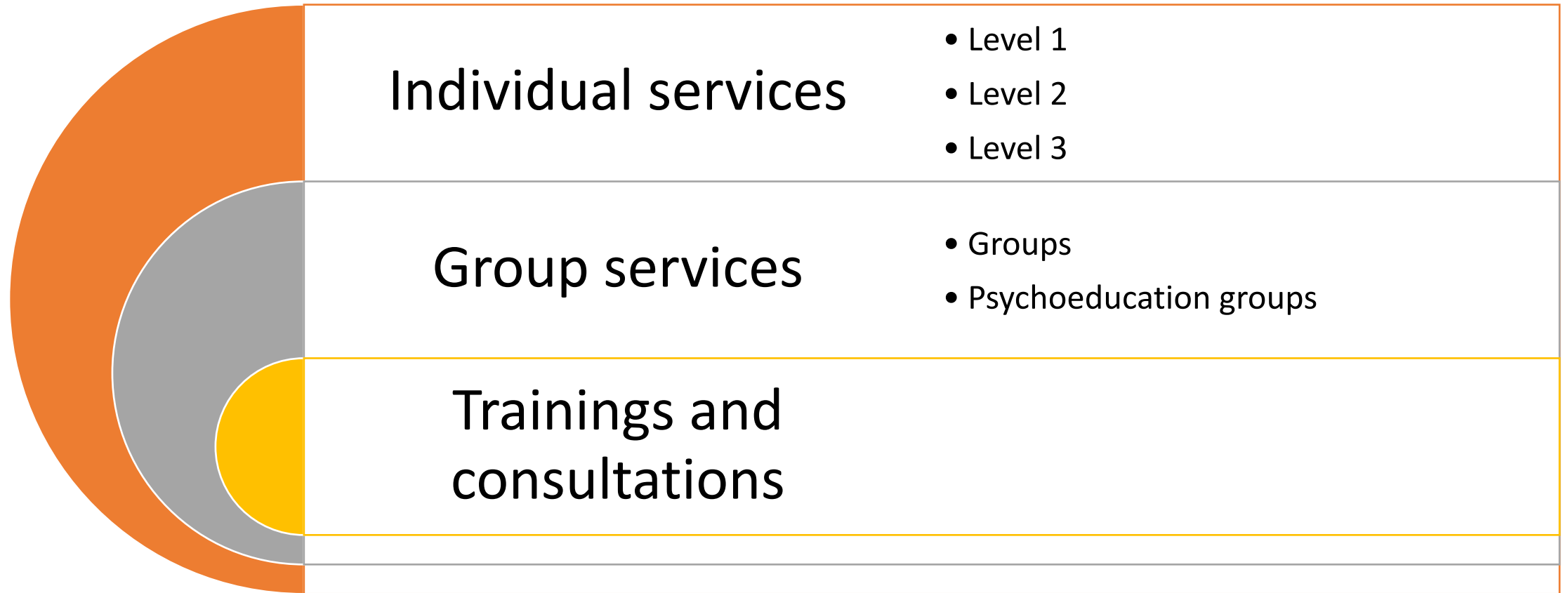
Screening and Eligibility Tier III

- After a Tier III referral request is made, CSEP Tier III staff member conducts an ***evaluation** including:
 - Review of the student's documentation/records.
 - Observation of the student.
 - Consultations with the student's Instructors and HGAC Counselor.
 - Interview with the student.
- CSEP Tier III staff reviews the case and writes an evaluation ***report** that includes:
 - Areas of intervention.
 - Recommendations:
 - Accommodations.
 - Strategies.
 - Whether or not ongoing CSEP Tier III services are recommended.

CSEP Tier III

- **Mission:**
 - To assist individuals who did not receive Tier I services through:
 - Evaluations to assess areas of intervention and make recommendations for strategies, accommodations and other possibly beneficial areas of support.
 - Provide 1-on-1 or group cognitive rehabilitation support in the development of strategies and accommodations for students that may benefit.
 - To assist the staff in developing reasonable accommodations to promote positive outcomes.
- Services are based on student needs.

CSEP Tiers II & III Services





CSEP Interventions

EASE

PEERS

Work Readiness

Community Engagement

Goal of CSEP

- The overarching goal of CSEP has remained the same:

to improve employment outcomes for transition-aged individuals with cognitive disabilities by increasing awareness of strengths, limitations and impact of disability, through the development of social-emotional and executive functioning skills.

Rationale for Updates to Treatment Targets and Interventions

- Originally in CSEP, a broad range of developmental and cognitive challenges were targeted simultaneously and in sequence.
- However, over the past 20 years, HGAC and CSEP staff observed:
 - Few students being able to generalize learned skills to new environments.
 - More students presenting with co-occurring symptoms of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc.

Rationale, cont.

In 2019, CSEP interventions were re-focused on four primary targets:

- We concluded that program targets needed to be narrowed to focus on fewer targets with ***repetition** and ***depth** rather than breadth.
- Given the expertise of our staff in cognitive disabilities, we expanded the scope of our program to also address co-occurring MH symptoms.



EASE

- Emotional regulation is addressed through the ***Emotional Awareness and Skills Enhancement (EASE)** program.
- Emotion regulation is a transdiagnostic mechanism underlying many mental health disorders and symptoms.
- EASE is an evidence-based therapy program designed to target emotional regulation impairments through a mindfulness approach.
- Participants are taught to cultivate a present moment and non-judgement awareness.

Beck et al., 2020; Mazefsky & White, 2014; White et al., 2021



PEERS

- Social skills are addressed through the Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS[®]) for Young Adults curriculum.
- PEERS[®] is an evidence-based social skills intervention for motivated young adults who are interested in learning ways to help them make and keep friends, and to develop romantic relationships.

Demo

- Presenters, PEERS Certified Providers, will invite audience members to participate in a PEERS demonstration where a specific social skill is taught, demonstrated and practiced.

Work Readiness

- Work readiness programming incorporates aspects of pre-vocational training, including:
 - Soft skills (e.g., punctuality, hygiene).
 - Professional behavior (e.g., professional introductions; teamwork).
 - Identifying, securing and using reasonable accommodations through self-advocacy.

Mentorships

- Mentorships are a career training and development tool in which local business and organization leaders provide a real-world work experience and regular performance feedback.
- Mentorships are an ideal opportunity for participants to practice implementing the strategies and accommodations they have developed in CSEP.

Community Engagement

- Community engagement includes participation in community-based activities, organizations, agencies and institutions with activities, such as volunteering, activism and voting.
- In addition to facilitating positive relationships in the local community, these activities are excellent opportunities to generalize skills learned to the real world.



Clinical Pathways

Referrals to HGAC

- 10 OVR District Offices

Disposition back to District Offices

- External training programs
- Employment
- Specialized intervention services

CSEP, CART & PETS Programming

- Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Evaluation
- Support Services

Conclusions

- Collaboration makes it possible!
- CSEP is one established model for developing a comprehensive clinical rehabilitation program for transition-age adults with NCD.
- The sustainability of this model is supported by the lengthy history of the partnership with over 600 individuals served.



Thank You!

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Questions?

