

Venango Training and Development Center, Inc.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VTDC HOSTS 8TH ANNUAL “LIFE AFTER SCHOOL”
TRANSITION CONFERENCE ENTITLED “TALENT HAS NO BOUNDARIES”
15 Area School Districts Gather to Connect Students with Disabilities to
Post-secondary Opportunities

On Thursday, October 20, Venango Training and Development Center, Inc. (VTDC) hosted the **8th Annual “Life After School” Transition Conference entitled “Talent Has No Boundaries.”** The event was held at Zion Church in Clarion, PA and drew the attendance of more than 170 students, 30 presenters, and nearly sixty other adults including transition coordinators, special education professionals, parents, volunteers, guests and agency representatives throughout Riverview Intermediate Unit #6. Fourteen of the seventeen school districts in IU6 participated including Allegheny - Clarion Valley School District, Brockway Area School District, Brookville Area School District, Clarion Area School District, Clarion Limestone, Cranberry Area School District, DuBois Area School District, Keystone School District, North Clarion County School District, Punxsutawney Area School District, Redbank Valley School District, Titusville Area School District, Union School District and Valley Grove School District.

LAS 2011 opened with motivational speaker Robert Pruitt, who challenged the audience to **“share the gift they are with the world (1 Peter 4:10).”** Participants attended breakout sessions covering topics such as career exploration, interviewing skills, employment and vocational services, UPMC Northwest Project SEARCH, Social Networking, health and wellness, volunteering and service, STEM careers, teambuilding and leadership, body tattoos and piercings, bullying, and service dogs. The day concluded with speaker and youth trainer **Joe Markiewicz**, who talked about **“Igniting Your Spark”** and how to develop Assets in youth and in our communities. Students from Keystone Jr.-Sr. High School provided live music with their band “Ultimate Statement.”

Session presenters included representatives from the PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Venango County Office of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, Venango Training and Development Center, Inc. (VTDC), Riverview Intermediate Unit #6 (IU6), AHEDD, Northwest Workforce Investment Title I Youth Services Youth Coordinators and Career Counselors, Clarion YMCA, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, AmeriCorps/Keystone SMILES, Northwest STEM Initiative, PA State Police, Goodwill Industries, Adagio Health, and PPC Violence Free Network/Family Service and Children’s Aid Society.

This year’s event was funded through grants and donations from Bridge Builders Community Foundations Venango Human Service Fund grant, CMS Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (CFDA #93.768), Riverview Intermediate Unit #6, Rick Bowler Allstate Insurance Agency, Community First Bank of Reynoldsville, and Second Presbyterian Church of Oil City.

About LAS

LAS is open to all students, but its primary purpose is to connect underserved students, who have disabilities or other barriers, to resources and opportunities that will help them transition successfully to “life after school.” Eligible students may include those who receive autistic support, blind-visually impaired support, deaf and hard of hearing support, emotional support, learning support, life skills support, multiple disabilities support, physical support, and/or speech and language support.

In 2004, the first LAS event was hosted by the Riverview Intermediate Unit #6 (IU6) and was created in partnership with the Mentor Parent Program to connect students with disabilities, parents, and teachers with resources and information to aid in students’ successful transition to ‘life after school.’ LAS relocated in 2005 to the Zion Baptist Church and Conference Center in Clarion for the facility’s large capacity auditorium and classrooms. Since then, LAS has become a mainstay event for participants and presenters throughout IU6. Last year, the event drew more than 540 students and adults, and required more than 50 presenters.

In January 2011, IU#6 collaborated with VTDC to assume the role as lead agency. As a Workforce Investment Title I Youth Provider with established relationships within the 17 School Districts, and 38 years of experience serving disabled youth and adults, VTDC gladly agreed to assume the administrative role.

To avoid lapsing a year due to severe state and federal budget cuts, this year’s event was moved from its original springtime schedule to fall, and was held in October to coincide with National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM).

(See attached photos)

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Above is a group from Brockway Area Jr./Sr. High School: Pictured are Terri Fleegeer, Courtney Gankosky, Josh Wrighter, Missy Duttry, Tyler Duttry, Holly Heitzenrater, Samantha Chewing, (Parents) Tammy Wrighter and Gary Wrighter, Sr. High Guidance Counselor Jessi Suesser is missing from the photo. (Photo submitted).



Above left is keynote speaker Robert Pruitt. (Photos submitted).