

Year Three Evaluation:

On the Right Track

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Researchers at the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources contracted with the Texas Department of Health (TDH) to evaluate its *On the Right Track* Project, a project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to address the prevention of secondary conditions for persons with disabilities in Texas. In addition to the Evaluation goal that the Ray Marshall Center is addressing, the project has three main goals: Science, Service and Leadership. The Science goal addresses knowledge concerning the magnitude and severity of disabilities and secondary conditions. The Service goal is concerned with promoting healthy lifestyles for people with disabilities in Texas by increasing the awareness of the need for preventing secondary conditions within the learning domain among consumers, providers and policy makers. The Leadership goal relates to strengthening TDH's leadership role in understanding and preventing secondary conditions that are associated with disabilities in the learning domain. Ultimately, *On the Right Track* seeks to improve learning, achievement, and overall quality of life in people with disabilities in Texas.

The evaluation of Year 3 *On the Right Track* activities primarily addressed process and implementation aspects of the project. Researchers reviewed project documents and conducted structured interviews with current and former *On the Right Track* and related staff at TDH, as well as key individuals with sites in Bell and Harris County and researchers at Southwest Texas State University.

The first three years of the *On the Right Track* implementation have not been a complete success in terms of its three major (non-Evaluation) goals and associated objectives. There have been continuing contracting and staff turnover problems at all levels, shifts in project focus, and difficulties with securing the required IRB approvals, among others. The Science goal has been the most problematical. While the BRFS data analysis conducted by Southwest Texas State University researchers proceeded largely on schedule, none of the other component efforts, including the Houston/telemedicine and Bell County family-centered planning projects, had succeeded as Science projects by the end of Year 3. However, many important accomplishments

have been logged in this time. Activities under the Service and Leadership goals were carried out with greater success.

Under the Service goal, the *On the Right Track* website was operational and highly accessible by year's end, and most of the related promotional activities had occurred as well. Project staff also made substantial progress in bolstering the agency's leadership position in the disability policy area. TDH accomplished these goals working closely with and through key *On the Right Track* partners, especially the Southwest Texas State University research team in San Marcos. It also enjoyed a boost of energy and expertise with the addition of the Central Texas Network for Children with Special Needs located in Bell County. *On the Right Track* has now largely been reoriented as a capacity- and systems-building project as CDC had originally intended and has begun to focus on integrating its CDC-funded activities within TDH and the larger disability prevention umbrella as part of the post-grant transition.

In Year 4, the Ray Marshall Center will work closely with TDH and its partner staff to evaluate the effectiveness of family-centered planning training in Temple for trainers, family members, educators and health care providers and to develop an evaluation approach that can capture and measure progress on the important systems- and capacity-building dimensions of the project.