

# SUCCESS STORY— E1MN COLLABORATION



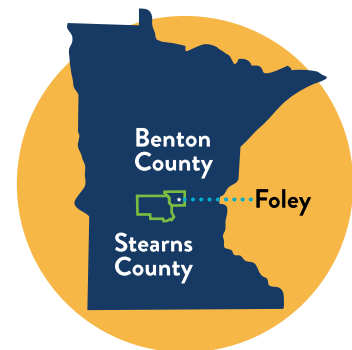
Professional spotlight:  
Kelly Popp, Mary Keating, Amy Meyer



E1MN is Minnesota's state agency partnership to advance Employment First outcomes for youth and adults with disabilities.

## Supporting youth in transition

Foley's local transition planning team works together today for students' successes tomorrow



One spring day in 2023, Benton and Stearns County families visited a local college campus to learn about resources for youth with disabilities who are transitioning to adulthood.

"I got to talk to a lot of families that are with youth in transition," recounted Amy Meyer, Benton County's Home and Community-Based Waiver Case Manager and Lead Agency Employment Liaison. "They were struck by the spectrum of services and supports available."

The event convened housing, county, mental health and other professionals in one spot to make it easy on youth and families. The fair was one way Foley's local transition planning team embodies [Minnesota's](#)

Youth in Transition Framework; meeting various organizations and learning about the services and supports available prepared the team to collaborate better going forward.

### WHO'S WHO

**Kelly Popp**, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Department of Employment and Economic Development, Vocational Rehabilitation Services

**Mary Keating**, Foley High School Special Education Teacher with 18- to 22-year-old program, Work-Based Learning Coordinator

**Amy Meyer**, Home and Community-Based Waiver Case Manager at Benton County and Lead Agency Employment Liaison for Benton County

"We had this beautiful opportunity to engage with our community and the agencies that support it," said Mary Keating, a Special Education Teacher and Work-Based Learning Coordinator at Foley High School. "Families felt well-informed. They were excited about the opportunity that it was right here in Foley."

The Framework helps the team rethink how they work to simplify their jobs and build for youths' future success in adulthood. It's part of Minnesota's [E1MN partnership](#), a way of working together to deliver a coordinated support system so

“Each plan is customized to the [youth], and the families are at the core of this. There’s no wrong door.”

—Amy Meyer

people with disabilities know their options and get what they need to reach their goals, including competitive integrated employment.

### MINNESOTA’S YOUTH IN TRANSITION FRAMEWORK

Many professionals have roles in supporting youth with disabilities to transition from school to adulthood. Youth and families often report being confused about who does what and get frustrated having to repeat themselves to different professionals at different agencies. Professionals, meanwhile, need clarity about how to support youth, including what is available, who pays for it and with whom to partner.

E1MN and transition leaders statewide created Minnesota’s Youth in Transition Framework to help. The Framework strengthens partnerships between schools, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)/State Services for the Blind (SSB), waiver case managers and service providers. The Framework:

- promotes the goals of youth and the teams that support them,
- is flexible to meet the needs of any youth with disabilities,
- makes professionals’ jobs easier by providing clarity and efficiency, and
- builds consistency and equity across the state.

### IMPROVES TEAMWORK AND PREPARES YOUTH FOR THE FUTURE

Foley’s local transition planning team described how the Framework shifts the way they think about and do their work.

#### Overcoming silos to truly center on youth

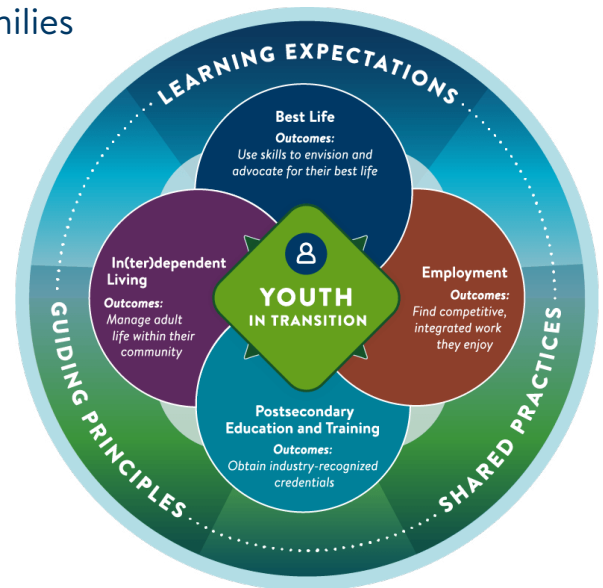
Minnesota’s Youth in Transition Framework’s first guiding principle inspires the Foley team to keep **youth at the center** of their work—rather than seeing silos across different agencies.

Just as the Framework itself puts youth at the center, “each plan is customized to the [youth], and the families are at the core of this,” Amy said. “There’s no wrong door.”

As one way of centering on youth, the Foley team underscored the importance of **collaborative partnerships** with families—a shared practice of the Framework—to preparing youth for successful adulthood.

“They’re just as much a member of the team as we all are when we’re providing services,” VRS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Kelly Popp said.

Kelly described one student whose parents were unfamiliar with the resources available for supporting their youth into adulthood. The



Developed by E1MN and transition leaders statewide, [Minnesota’s Youth in Transition Framework](#) strengthens the partnership between schools, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)/State Services for the Blind (SSB), county agencies/tribal nations and service providers.

family could not imagine a future where their child lived independently. As a result of the team’s relationships and shared knowledge, the student was able to express their desire to live independently—and Kelly was able to point the family toward resources to support that goal.

“Without our collaborative approach, this issue may have never surfaced,” Kelly said. “So just making that connection ... ‘Here, these are your resources,’ opens up those doors for them to be able to have more information.”

“I feel very comfortable now reaching out to Amy and saying, ‘How do we get this started?’ or, ‘At what step will the county step in and help the student with this?’”

—Mary Keating

One resource the team uses is the [Transition/Pre-ETS inventory](#), which can be used to get a full picture of the youth’s transition-related strengths and needs.

“[The inventory] centers on the student rather than a particular program,” Kelly said.

The inventory is a tool of **the youth planning process**, a shared practice of the Framework, which brings everyone to the same table and means families can go to anyone for updates.

The team also has consistent expectations of each other. These expectations allow team members to constructively challenge each other to do what is best for youth.

“One of our expectations is just to have very true and real conversations with each other,” Mary said. “... We’ve grown in our ability to have difficult conversations, with our goal being, how do we make this better for youth?”

Additional shared practices across local transition planning teams further streamline the experience for youth and families. For example, Foley’s team establishes shared practices around referrals and consents, so the team is able to communicate freely, Kelly said.

In another example of the Framework’s **collaborative**

**partnerships**, the Foley team meets monthly. “We became one working entity,” Mary said. “Rather than all of these different parts, I feel very comfortable now reaching out to Amy and saying, ‘How do we get this started?’ or, ‘At what step will the county step in and help the student with this?’”

### ***Collaborating today to prepare youth for success tomorrow***

The Foley team sees the Framework as a useful tool for their number one goal—supporting youth and their families. Through teamwork, Mary, Amy and Kelly make the most of the pivotal time when youth transition from high school to adulthood.

“That has been the biggest change from [applying] the Framework: making sure that all of those things are in place early so that you don’t get to that point later on and go, ‘Oh no, they don’t have any funding streams in place for long-term job supports,’” Kelly said.

Amy agreed, noting she sees more proactive planning for the future now, rather than waiting until a youth is 20 or 21 years old. More planning allows more opportunities for youth to prepare for better futures.

### **LOOKING AHEAD**

The Foley team wants professionals across Minnesota to see how the Framework helps them do their jobs better—a story worth sharing.

Kelly remembers being overwhelmed by the Framework at first.

Now? “It makes perfect sense,” she said. “Now, I understand that all of this is not considered to be my responsibility, that there are different pieces of it that are my responsibility, and the whole purpose behind it is teamwork and bringing everybody to the table so that the student has what they need.”

Amy, too, hesitated at first. Waiver case managers like her are busy, and employment support is just one of many aspects of their job. However, her perspective changed through seeing the Framework in action. She encouraged county-level professionals elsewhere in Minnesota to get on board.

“We are a big part of the equation for youth in transition,” Amy said. “... Having somebody on a waiver team that can somewhat specialize in transition helps strengthen the disability services county waiver team because then you have a point of contact that the team can go to.”

### **LEARN MORE**

Check out additional transition resources in the [Youth in Transition Toolkit](#).