

2022 TANF Innovation Project Report

The TANF Innovation Project is a partnership between the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), and the Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards (MAWB). The project offers structured work experiences and related services to the following youth receiving Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) benefits:

- **Teen parents, ages 16-24, who are receiving cash MFIP benefits; and**
- **Younger youth ages 14-18, who are on the grant in MFIP households.**

In addition to **work experience**, the project incorporates **labor market information**, measurement of **work readiness skill development**, introduction to **career pathways**, **financial literacy training**, **preparation for post-secondary education**, and **culturally responsive programming**. Participants work with a youth counselor to develop a plan for **services based on individual need**. The plans include short-term and longer-term goals and incorporate career counseling and case management services for the participant to obtain and maintain employment and develop a career plan.

Work Experience

This project provides many participants with their first opportunity for work experience, a planned and structured learning experience in a workplace for a limited time. Typically the work experiences are **paid employment opportunities** during the summer and/or school year, but they may also include unpaid **internships**, **job shadowing**, **on-the-job training** and/or **pre-apprenticeship** activities. Work experiences provide opportunities for career exploration and skill development, and are targeted as much as possible to the **specific career interests** of the participant. Examples of employers providing work experiences in 2019 can be found below. Several youth have subsequently been hired by the employers who hosted their work experience.

Labor Market Information

Youth counselors have been trained in using **labor market tools** and also access the expertise of DEED's **regional labor market analysts** as they work with the youth to develop the individual plan. Participants learn about the opportunities available in **high-growth, in-demand occupations** through field trips to local businesses and tools such as **MN Careers**, **Minnesota Works.net**, and **CareerWISE**.

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Funding amount: | \$271,784 |
| TANF innovation funds from the Department of Human Services | |
| Average cost per participant: | \$1,300 per youth |
| Number served: | 209 |
| Gender: | 78% female; 22% male |
| Youth from communities of color: | 49% |
| Youth with a disability: | 20% |
| Teen parent: | 66% |
| Younger youth in MFIP household: | 34% |

Work Readiness Skill Development

Work readiness training provides an introduction to the **expectations and responsibilities** of having a job. Work readiness skill development occurs **before and during placement** in a work experience. Many project sites use a curriculum to teach basic work readiness skills in a workshop setting before the participant begins the work experience. Common topics of this training include: identifying transferrable and employability skills; effective time management; goal-setting strategies; communication skills including listening, non-verbal communication, communicating with supervisors and co-workers, appropriate worksite language and language etiquette; job search techniques, how to complete a job application, prepare a resume and cover letter; interviewing skills; employment laws and employment forms; interpreting a paycheck; keeping a job, problem solving and conflict resolution. Work readiness skills are **evaluated by worksite supervisors** at multiple points during the work experience and participants receive **feedback on strengths and areas for improvement**.

Introduction to Career Pathways

In addition to general career exploration, youth are introduced to the idea of career pathways and career laddering opportunities. Several of the sites have career pathway programs in industries such as **construction, health care, manufacturing, information technology, human services, office and administrative technology, call center and 911 Telecommunications**. Career Pathways programs provide a pathway in high-growth, in-demand occupations where individuals can enhance basic academic skills, participate in job training and earn industry-recognized credentials and post-secondary education credits. TANF Innovation Project participants can enter these programs or create their own pathway in an area of individual interest with the help of their youth counselor. The work experience also is used as a tool to educate participants about career pathways associated with the position or industry in which the young person is working.

Financial Literacy Training

A variety of **financial literacy tools and strategies** help each youth learn skills necessary for long-term financial stability. Counselors assist youth in **opening a bank account** for direct deposit of their paychecks and the development of a personal relationship with a local financial institution. In many cases, this is the first time anyone in the family has ever opened a bank account. Curricula such as the **FDIC's Money Smart for Young Adults** and the **University of Minnesota Extension's Dollars into Sense** introduce key personal finance concepts such as saving, budgeting, and the importance of credit, investments and loans. In some cases, youth use earnings from the program to contribute to the family household budget.

Preparation for Post-Secondary Education

Counselors work with participants in a variety of ways to prepare them to pursue and succeed in post-secondary education as part of their career plan. Activities may include: **tours of training institutions**; assistance with **college applications and fees** ; help with registration for **Accuplacer exams**; connections to **services at the training institutions** (such as TRIO, Student Services, Academic Center, Bookstore,

etc.); assistance with **completion of financial aid forms and identification of scholarships, grants and student loans**; assistance with **course registration**; and **ongoing support** throughout each school term.

Culturally Responsive Programming

Local sites work with partners and worksites to provide services responsive to various needs and cultural backgrounds. Youth are placed at quality worksites that fit their interest and can **accommodate their cultural beliefs**. In addition, employers are informed of any necessary accommodations to the worksite. For example, there are many cultures that prohibit people from touching pork. In such a case, the youth

Examples of Employers Providing Work Experience:

Anoka County Mississippi Library, Ridgeview Medical Center, Northland Arboretum, Jake's Stadium Pizza, Austin Parks and Recreation, Willmar Public Schools, Encore Coffee, Mercy Hospital, Sibley East High School-IT Department, Four Directions Childcare, Winthrop Market, Hip Hop Family Shop, Valley Youth Center, Bridgeway Estates, City of Cottonwood, Cattale's Books, Graham Tire

counselor may avoid a worksite that involves contact with pork, work with the employer to assign duties that don't involve contact with pork, or develop other worksite accommodations for the participant. In all services, **interpreters** are utilized when requested. Some sites have worksite **supervisors who speak other languages**. The supervisors are encouraged to use English when possible to practice the language in a work setting, but are able to communicate important safety or workplace policies or

procedures in their native language to avoid misunderstandings and ensure a successful work experience. The work experiences can also provide an opportunity for participants to **share their cultural heritage with others**, such as one participant who was able to share her Hispanic heritage with the children at her worksite at a local daycare.

Success Stories

Chelsea - Rural MN CEP, Inc.

Chelsea had dropped out of high school and was a single parent receiving MFIP. She was using the child under one exemption and had just started the BI-CAP Youth Build program when she first learned about RMCEP services and enrolled in the TANF Youth program. She was struggling to figure out what to do with her life. RMCEP provided ongoing mentoring, case management, and career counseling, to identify and assist Chelsea in overcoming her barriers. She struggled with anxiety and was reliant on others to provide transportation. Through Youth Build she completed driver's training and earned her license. She worked hard during her time at BI-CAP Youth Build to earn the necessary credits for graduation and received her diploma through the Cass Lake Alternative Learning Center. While there, she focused on classes in the mornings and learned valuable work skills and earned a wage as a Housing Rehabilitation Technician in the afternoons. Chelsea earned her First Aid/Basic Life Support Certification and attended a six-hour Rent-Wise course on site at Youth Build, and she received supportive services of gas cards and interview and job-specific clothing. Chelsea was interested in early childhood education and decided she would like to work in the Early Childhood Education field before investing the time and energy it would take to attend school, work, and raise her daughter. In January 2023, Chelsea accepted a position with the BI-CAP Head Start program as a Family Coach. Head Start will also pay for Chelsea to obtain her Child

Development Associate (CDA) Credential. The Childhood Development Associate is a widely recognized credential in early childhood education and guides early childcare professionals as they work toward becoming qualified teachers of young children. Chelsea plans to complete that credential in a year and may consider further education at that time.

Rose – City of Duluth Workforce Development

Rose was referred to the TANF Youth project by her MFIP counselor to help her improve her employability by completing her GED and gaining work skills. Rose enrolled in TANF when many businesses were still closed to the public. Rose's YES Duluth counselor connected her with Duluth Adult Education so she could start studying online at her family home. Eventually she was able to attend an in-person tutoring cohort and made significant progress in Language Arts. With the encouragement and support from her career counselors, Rose secured gainful employment at a local healthcare facility. She has moved off MFIP, continues to work on her GED, and is looking for her own housing closer to work.

Samanthah – Central MN Jobs and Training Services (CMJTS)

Samanthah is a 22-year-old mother and MFIP recipient enrolled in the CMJTS TANF Youth program. Samanthah was referred to the TANF Youth program for career and college exploration and tuition assistance. She had been accepted to Lake Superior College when her youth employment specialist started to assist her with her journey. Samanthah is currently taking classes to become a dental hygienist. After she is done with school, she is hoping to find a job right away in the dental hygienist field. Samanthah stated CMJTS has been a great help with tuition assistance, and she will therefore owe less in student loans. Samanthah's main goal is to become self-sufficient and thanks to the support of CMJTS' youth programs, she stated she expects she will be able to reach this goal.

Selena - Minnesota Valley Action Council (MVAC)

Selena was referred to MVAC in 2018 and has worked with several staff, on and off, over the years. She was first referred to the DWP program and then participated in the MFIP program. Selena is a kind and nurturing individual and expressed a desire to attend school for nursing or early childhood development. Selena's MFIP counselor referred her to MVAC's Youth Program to explore educational options and to give her the opportunity to participate in a work experience. Her youth worker was able to place her at a local daycare center where she excelled and successfully completed a work experience. She worked closely with her youth worker and determined that she wanted to attend South Central College for early childhood education. She started school 8/24/2020 and despite being a single mother to two young boys and working full time at a local daycare center, she successfully completed school and graduated 5/12/2022 with her ECE Diploma. Selena also completed MVAC's Get Started program to learn new work skills; she received guidance on budgeting and was connected with various community resources. Selena has overcome many obstacles in her life and has faced these obstacles with a positive attitude. She is resilient and strong and never complained when life took an unexpected turn. She has worked extremely hard to better herself and provide for her sons and be a positive role model for them. As of June 2022, Selena has closed off from MFIP due to her income. Selena was awarded the MVAC Brown County Achiever award in 2022 and currently works as a MVAC Head Start Home Visitor. Selena dreams of buying a house and starting her own daycare business someday and is in the early stages of exploring how to make this happen.

Nancy - Minneapolis Employment and Training/MVNA

Nancy says she's "always known" that she wanted a career in healthcare which made the On Ramp to Healthcare Internship program a great fit for her career journey. After facing some adversity in pursuing her 4-year degree as a young parent, Nancy came to the Pathways program to revisit her educational options and develop a career plan in Spring 2022. After getting connected to the internship program, Nancy quickly found herself drawn to the work of Hennepin Healthcare's Digital Equity Expert (DEX) program and accepted an internship position as a Digital Navigator Intern in Fall 2022. Nancy has been a standout leader in her internship and trained other Digital Navigator interns to work in the hospital and surrounding clinics while attending Minneapolis College to pursue a degree in Psychology. Upon completion of her internship in March of 2023, Nancy was eligible to apply for a permanent position as a Digital Navigator, Patient Services Representative or Connection Center Advisor. DEX is a great example of an internship-to-hire workforce development program and Nancy is a prime example of how the Healthcare On Ramp and TANF Youth funding can act as a springboard for MFIP young parents to participate in postsecondary education while advancing their career through paid internship opportunities.

Andre – Anoka County Job Training Center

Anoka County met Andre in January of 2021; his mother heard of the TANF Innovations program through her MFIP Vocational Counselor. Andre was 16 years old and attending Fridley High School when staff enrolled him in the TANF program and Minnesota Youth Program. Staff worked with Andre to identify his goals of completing high school and gaining work experience in an area of interest. Andre had little work experience but expressed an interest in working around kids or cleaning at an employer close to his home. Andre was placed at Little Voyageurs' Montessori School, as a Custodial Assistant making \$11 an hour. He worked part-time cleaning and helping with the children when needed. Andre quickly gained a good reputation of having strong initiative, helping with tasks outside of his normal responsibilities, and always having a smiling personality around staff and the children. His supervisor noted on his evaluation that 'he is a pleasure to have as part of our community!' So much so that he was hired to officially work for Little Voyageurs' Montessori School in October 2022 earning \$14 an hour. Andre told staff that the program has helped him learn skill sets that he never had and that he loves his job as the staff and children are so friendly. Andre graduated from Fridley High School in June 2023. In addition to working at Little Voyageurs' Montessori School he continues to work with staff on career assessment, working on goals for after high school, and obtaining his driver's license.

Janyia - Ramsey County/Workforce Solutions

Janyia is 17-year-old TANF youth participant who attends the High School for Recording Arts in St. Paul, MN. She had some experience as working as a cashier at an ice cream shop, as well as working at a food bank. During her time in TANF Youth, Janyia participated in various career readiness workshops. She learned to develop and enhance her resume, practice, and increase her interview skills through mock interviews, and create cover letters. Janyia utilized the skills and knowledge that she learned to obtain a job as Personal Care Assistant. She has a passion for helping others and wants to grow into the medical career path. She also expressed interest in enrolling in the Right Track program to pursue an internship in public health.

Hailey – Career Solutions

Hailey's story in her own words: "I first heard about Career Solutions when I was at Quarryview attending GED and Adult Diploma classes. I knew I wanted to go to college, so I was interested in the WIOA youth program that they talked to me about. Once I started the program, they gave me the skills and strength I needed to achieve my goals. I never thought I would get my GED or diploma, much less have the opportunity to attend college, but the program showed me that it is possible. They provided more support than I ever received attending high school. When I was looking for work, my Career Planner told me about a TANF program that could help pay my wages to get some work experience. Soon after that, I started working in the Career Force Lab assisting community members with job search needs. The work experience program has given me so much. It has given me the ability to get back into the work force, given me examples and resources of how to better my resume and skills to improve my overall work ethic. Career Solutions has given me the ability to work, attend school and still give me the time to be a mother. Most importantly Career Solutions has given me a community. Everyone supports everyone without judgement, it's like a little family."

For more information:

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
332 Minnesota St., Suite E-200
St. Paul, MN 55101

Kay Tracy, Director
Office of Youth Development
Kay.Tracy@state.mn.us or
651.259.7555

Lynn Douma, Program Coordinator
Office of Youth Development
Lynn.Douma@state.mn.us or
651.259.7536

Updated 8/4/2023