

**PARTNERS FOR YOUTH CAREER PATHWAYS ROUND 7 YOUTH DEI
ON-SITE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING REPORT
GRANTEE: RURAL MINNESOTA CONCENTRATED EMPLOYMENT
PROGRAM, Inc. (RMCEP)
DATE AND LOCATION: May 1, 2018 – Alexandria, MN**

STAFF INTERVIEWED: Vicki Leaderbrand, Director of Operations/Human Resources Administration
Nancy Stensgard, Disability Resource Coordinator
Angela Bartolomeo, Employment Counselor

DEED STAFF: Cory Schmid – DEI Project Lead, Employment and Training Programs

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE ONSITE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING REPORT

The purpose of this on-site technical assistance visit was to conduct a review of RMCEP's Disability Employment Initiative Project, to ensure compliance with state and federal rules, regulations, and statutes. The Minnesota Youth Disability Employment Initiative On-site Technical Assistance Guide, March 2018, served as the basis for discussions.

The categories reviewed were *Outreach, Access and Referrals, Program Implementation, and On-Site Documentation Review*. The on-site review was conducted on, May 1, 2018. All backup documentation and notes are on file at the DEED Employment and Training Programs in St. Paul, Minnesota.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project intends to serve 100 youth with a disability who also have an additional risk factor. In addition, RMCEP staff will actively recruit youth of color, refugees, and new Americans who qualify to receive services under the Round 7 DEI project. The DEI project will help RMCEP increase co-enrollments in the Minnesota Youth Program (MYP), WIOA Youth/Adult, and strengthen referrals between community partners. Currently, there are 68 participants enrolled in the DEI project.

PROJECT EXPENDITURES

Grant Amount: \$495,000

Grant Number: 7029600

Need for Technical Assistance/Corrective Action: None.

Expenditure Levels as of March 31, 2018: \$168,171.44 or 34% of funds are expended.

BUDGET

The grantee has expended 34% as of March 31, 2018. As of March 31, 2018, the breakdown of the budget, with Cost Category titles are as follows: Administration

\$34,334.51, Personnel \$68,043.39, Fringe Benefits \$26,390.12, Travel \$5,010.15, Equipment/Supplies \$3,882.19, Financial Literacy Training \$6,860.74, Contractual: Benefit Planning \$7,250.00, Construction/Space Costs \$3,615.21, Other Contractual \$0, and Youth Wage and Fringe \$12,785.13.

REPORTING

The grantee has provided detailed and timely quarterly narrative reports along with monthly financial reports. In addition, RMCEP has included success stories from DEI participants.

CONCERNS/CORRECTIVE ACTION

There were no concerns corrective actions identified with the implementation or progress of the DEI grant.

PROJECT GOALS, PERFORMANCE, SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

Currently, there are 68 youth enrolled in the DEI project at RMCEP. RMCEP is on track to meet or even exceed their goal of serving 100 youth over the grant period. The DRC noted that there have been 10 exits from the program and only one individual who made the decision to quit receiving services from RMCEP. There are no issues identified in recruiting youth for the DEI program because many DEI participants initially received services under WIOA Youth or the Minnesota Youth Program (state-funded). RMCEP staff are extremely well-connected to local schools and receive referrals from teachers. RMCEP staff are frequently asked to come into the schools to speak about the services that are provided by RMCEP. There have been special requests to have staff talk to students on the Autism spectrum about their employment/education goals and how RMCEP can help them achieve those goals. The DRC also shares information with special education teachers such as the disability-focused *Employment Resource Guide*.¹

DEI participants receive services that help instill work ethic, work maturity, and soft skills that employers desire. Youth who are co-enrolled in WIOA complete the World of Work Inventory (WOWI) programming, in addition to other career exploration and planning activities. Work experiences are offered to younger youth participants and are limited to 29 hours per week. On-the-Job Trainings (OJTs) are reserved for older youth as OJTs are generally a full-time commitment. All DEI staff and youth are trained in OSHA safety training. RMCEP does offer OSHA 10 certification. Counselors work with youth and site supervisors to ensure that safety training is provided. Both the youth and the supervisor are required to sign a document confirming safety training was provided.

In accordance with the *Guideposts for Success* framework, RMCEP incorporates leadership activities in the programming offered to DEI participants. The leadership activities can vary depending on the interests of the participant as well as opportunities offered on work sites. More specifically, youth who have a work experience or an OJT on a work crew may be have the opportunity to become a crew leader and develop leadership skills through that role. Those who are selected to be crew leaders receive a

¹ https://mn.gov/deed/assets/employment-resource-guide_tcm1045-290595.pdf

slight pay increase. Participants may also be involved with school-sanctioned activities that allow them to build leadership skills.

The *Guideposts for Success* also identifies family involvement and support to ensure youth are successful as they transition from school to employment. RMCEP has taken steps to intentionally include parents and families into transition planning. For many youth, having parents or other family members (i.e. grandparents, friends, boyfriend/girlfriend) involved in Integrated Resource Teams (IRTs) has been helpful. RMCEP staff have noted the importance of having a caring individual involved in the IRTs because they serve as a strong support system for the youth. On rare occasions, parents and family members may be discouraged from involving themselves in career planning for their child because they may be hindering the success and progress of the youth.

The DRC has made a diligent effort to increase participation in 6 local Community Transition Interagency Committees (CTICs). Many of the CTICs in RMCEP's area were reactivated and reinvigorated with the involvement of the DRC. The DRC expressed that it has become more difficult for CTICs to engage parents and students on the committees because state statute does no longer requires parents or students to be members on the committees. However, the DRC noted that parents and students are being actively recruited at the 12 Parent Workshops and Parent Forums organized by the various CTIC groups and RMCEP. Minnesota Statute states that CTICs must "identify current services, programs, and funding sources provided within the community for secondary and postsecondary aged youth with disabilities and their families that prepare them for further education; employment, including integrated competitive employment; and independent living."² The charge of the CTICs aligns closely with the goals of the DEI. Thus, the DRC has engaged with the active CTICs and has shared information about the programming and services offered through RMCEP. Additional information shared with CTIC members have included workshops from VRS, SSA representatives, RMCEP Employment Counselors, and Mental Health Service providers.

RMCEP has engaged with businesses to inform business leaders on how they can address the labor force shortage by hiring individuals who are not currently in the labor force. The DRC has presented to multiple businesses and encouraged them to hire individuals with disabilities and people who have criminal backgrounds who may not currently be in the labor force. Businesses are also approached by employment counselors when trying to place a participant in a work experience or OJT. The counselor's first obtain consent from the participant to talk to employers to ensure that their rights as an individual with a disability is not infringed upon. If the participant is placed at a RMCEP business partner, then the counselor will regularly follow up with the work site to monitor the progress of the participant. This allows the counselor to receive feedback directly from the worksite supervisor which is helpful in identifying how the participant's skillset has grown. If the participant finds a job through their own job

² Minn. Stat. §125A.22 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=125a.22>)

searching, the counselor is typically less involved in monitoring progress at the worksite unless the youth and business agree to regular check-ins.

The employment counselor noted that she strives to meet with the participants at a minimum of once per month, depending on their needs. These check-ins allow the counselor to review the Individual Service Strategy (ISS) with the participant and update the ISS if needed. The counselor stated that text message and phone calls are the quickest ways to reach and receive a response from the participant. Once the participant has exited the program, follow up is conducted by the counselor. Often, there are youth who really enjoy the follow up and respond to the counselor. Other times, the youth does not respond once they have exited the program and counselors cannot reach them.

WORKSITE DEVELOPMENT

Grievances, discrimination complaints, accident reports: There have been two reports of accidents. The reports were for the same participant and has been documented.

Participant orientation and safety training:

As part of the worksite orientation, participants were given appropriate worksite training and safety training. Additional safety training is handled at each worksite by employees at the business. This ensures that DEI participants understand industry specific safety procedures that are relevant to the worksite.

PARTICIPANT FILE REVIEW

Ten randomly selected files were reviewed. The files were reviewed for the fourteen compliance items and for proper storage of documents. All files contained the following:

- Enrollment Date
- Birth Date (Copy)
- Proof of Citizenship
- Proof of Right-to-Work, if applicable
- Selective Service (copy-for males age 18+ born after 12/31/1959)
- Social Security Number (Copy)
- Veteran Status (DD214), if applicable
- Low-income status or history of intergenerational poverty
- Parental participation consent form, for minors
- Emergency contact person and phone number(s)
- Address and telephone number

The organization's files were in order and had the required and pertinent information.

Exemplary Sites, Best Practices/Good News Stories

Rural Minnesota CEP has co-enrolled 85% of youth DEI participants into the WIOA Youth or Adult program. The braiding of funds allows Rural CEP staff to provide wrap-around services and meet the needs of customers with disabilities.

Rural CEP's DRC and leadership are actively conducting outreach to increase the number of SSI/SSDI Ticket Holders receiving services. Currently, RMCEP has over \$ 104,574.68 in ticket revenue. Rural CEP is operating their Employment Network as part of the American Dream Employment Network (ADEN).

The DRC and leadership have identified serving individuals with disabilities as a priority for the RMCEP organization. In turn, RMCEP has incorporated DEI best practices and strategies into the annual youth employment counselor training. RMCEP has decided to add an additional counselor training throughout out the year and the DRC and RMCEP leadership will ensure that DEI components are included in the training for staff. The elements of DEI that are relevant for adult programs is also shared with employment counselors who work with adults.

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW

A participant intended to be interviewed as part of the on-site monitoring visit, however, the participant felt ill the morning of the monitoring visit and was not able to be present for the interview. The participant's employment counselor did reach out via text message to try and get a brief response from the participant. The participant noted that she enjoys the program and appreciates all the help that she has been able to receive through RMCEP. She also said that she would not change anything about the programming.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The project is being implemented and managed extremely well. It is clear the employment counselors, the DRC, and leadership are invested in the success of the DEI project. It is clear that staff are increasing their capacity to better serve individuals with disabilities.

REQUEST FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

At this time, there is no request for technical assistance. The organization would like to see more workshops for combining resources, seeing what others are doing/not working and possible networking opportunities.