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# TANF YOUTH INNOVATION PROJECT

EVALUATION REPORT

Economic Assistance and Employment Supports Division

April 2019

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**About the Minnesota Department of Human Services**

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (department) provides Minnesotans with a variety of services intended to help people live as independently as possible. The department serves Minnesotans in all 87 counties and 11 tribes.

## Abbreviations and acronyms used in this report

DHS	Minnesota Department of Human Services
DEED	Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
EAESD	Economic Assistance and Employment Supports Division
ES	Employment Service
HCMC	Hennepin County Medical Center
MET	Minneapolis Employment and Training
MFIP	Minnesota Family Investment Program
MVNA	Minnesota Visiting Nurses Association
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

## Introduction

This report summarizes the main findings of the initial evaluation of the 2018 TANF Youth Innovation Project (TANF Summer Youth). The project is based on an interagency agreement between the Minnesota Department of Human Services (department) and Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). This inter-agency agreement expands DEED's Summer Youth Work Experience to enable MFIP youth to gain exposure to work experience and to provide opportunities for career exploration and skill development. The project is supported by TANF Innovation funding, which allows for innovative

approaches to improving outcomes for MFIP participants. In this context, TANF Summer Youth is a decade-long pilot program funded by DHS and administered by DEED, with individual contracts to Minnesota Employment Service (ES) providers that typically run from March through December each year.

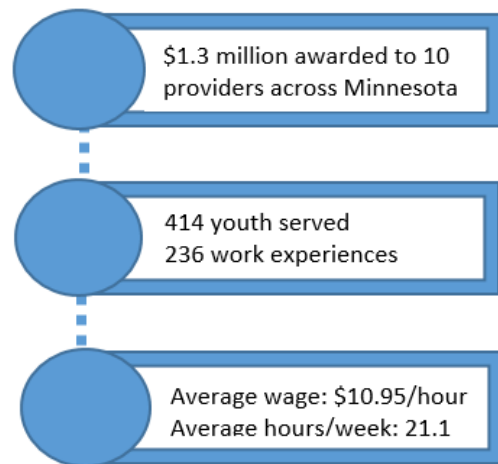
Interested in gathering feedback from participants and service providers, the department, through its Economic Assistance and Employment Supports Division (EAESD), evaluated implementation of the 2018 TANF Summer Youth program. Goals of the evaluation were:

- To understand the experiences of youth with the program
- Document how program sites and service providers have operationalized the program and funded activities
- Highlight lessons learned and challenges faced
- Propose recommendations for program implementation improvements and efficiency.

## Background

Employment rates among young adults in the U.S. have fallen in recent years [Jacobs et al., 2017], with the jobless rate for 16-19-year-olds three times the national average, and for 20-24-year-olds twice that of the national average. [Showalter and Spiker, 2016] Among teens and young adults, African-American and Hispanic teens experience the greatest difficulties in finding employment. [Sum, Khatiwada, Trubskyy & Ross, 2014] The TANF Summer Youth project was implemented to help improve short-term earnings and work experience, with a longer-term goal of preparing teens and young adults for career success.

A growing body of research has studied youth work programs in the U.S., generating discussion regarding such programs' short- versus long-term gains. Youth employment programs are created with goals of improving future job prospects and allowing disadvantaged or dislocated youth to develop work and other life skills that would otherwise be unavailable to them. [Showalter and Spiker, 2016] Studies



with positive findings suggest that “Greater exposure to employment gives youth experiences that can shape their aspirations, whether it be to complete high school, obtain career training, or attend college, potentially raising academic achievement.” [Modestino and Nguyen, 2016, p. 10] Time outside of school spent in employment and training activities also reduces the risk of youth engaging in gang or other criminal behavior. [Valentine et al., 2017] Evaluations of youth employment programs also highlighted participants’ improved connection to their community, and improved anger and conflict management. [Modestino and Nguyen, 2016; Valentine et al., 2017]

When it comes to demonstrating longer-term impacts of youth employment programs, past evaluations have shown mixed results. For example, in a study of the nation’s largest summer youth employment program, in New York City, found that participants’ experiences varied greatly by providers’ program implementation. [Valentine et al. 2017] While summer earnings and employment largely increased for participants, evaluators did not find significant effects on longer-term education, employment or earnings. In studying the effects of a different youth employment program, an evaluation of outcomes six years after program participation found increased likelihood of having formal (as opposed to informal or under the table) employment. [Ibarrarán, et al. 2015]

Previous studies found that to ensure a successful program and positive outcomes, multiple aspects of a youth employment program must be well developed and highly functioning in a variety of areas. A review literature suggests that successful youth programs do the following:

- **Allow sufficient time for programs to budget and operate their programs annually.** A recent review of youth employment programs across the country emphasized continuity and year-round operations to improve program stability and efficiency. [Robinson, Shanks & Meehan, 2017] When stable funding is lacking, youth employment programs fail to serve as many youth without as many services. Case studies from two of the nation’s largest youth employment programs further illustrate this challenge.

As described in its evaluation of Los Angeles’s summer youth employment program, late funding notices annually causes a rush to get the program set up and running. The sites are also not able to spend funds until July. Such constraints limit the ability of sites and staff to craft a successful program, and limits the ability of youth to participate. As evaluators stated, “With public school starting in late August, this leaves a very short window for delivering the program, and students are out of school for more than a month before the program begins.” [Moore et al. 2015, p. 5]

Similarly, New York City’s summer youth employment program had historically struggled to recruit participants as well as potential employers in time for summer. To address these recurring difficulties, program management moved several operations from February to November, allowing extra time to prepare. [City of New York, 2017] This allowed more time for grant budgeting as well as the participant application process.

- **Expand work experience placements by building and keeping strong relationships with businesses and stakeholders.** Connect businesses to under-served populations, and involve business partners in curriculum design and program development. [Ross and Kazis, 2016; Showalter and Spiker, 2016] These connections may be facilitated by an intermediary organization to help make and strengthen partnerships among businesses, workers and schools. Ways in which partnerships can be

strengthened would be an intermediary developing a training-related instruction curriculum, serving as an employer of record, or providing liability insurance, if needed. [Showalter and Spiker, 2016]

- **Collaborate with similar youth and employment programs, including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) youth program.** When agencies and programs collaborate in youth employment efforts, they can increase awareness, expand operations, and create efficiencies that could not happen otherwise. This applies to local as well as national programs that serve populations which overlap with TANF Summer Youth.
- Since its enactment in 2014, WIOA requires TANF to be a partner for workforce systems. [Joyce et al. 2015] This new requirement creates opportunities for cross-program collaboration for all TANF Summer Youth sites. As funding for both programs is limited, TANF funds for subsidized employment could be offered to youth co-enrolled in WIOA who may lack work experience opportunities. [Hall, 2015]
- **Build up participants' life skills (soft skills).** Provide instruction and role models for acceptable workplace culture, communication and conflict resolution, financial literacy, and other topics that prepare one for the workplace. [Ross and Kazis, 2016; Showalter and Spiker, 2016] Some topics to instruct youth in this area [BDA Global, 2016] include:
  - Appropriate workplace etiquette, attitudes and behaviors
  - Take directions and meet host expectations
  - Take initiative and realize results
  - Importance of teamwork
  - Communication skills to achieve success
  - Money management
  - Employment and payroll basics (completing a W-4 form, setting up direct deposit, etc.)
- **Provide support services.** To increase and maintain participation of youth, especially teen parents, provide child care and transportation services, as needed. Services could be provided by a youth employment program, an intermediary, or by a job site. [Showalter and Spiker, 2016] As noted by prior evaluations, affordable child care remains a barrier for many teen parents when considering employment opportunities. [Valentine et al., 2017]
- **Link participants to career pathways.** Programs can help youth with career success by arranging future employment, training, or education opportunities; by assisting the transition to post-secondary education; and by connecting participants with adult mentors working in their desired industry. The city of Long Beach, CA, helps participants apply for colleges, jobs, and AmeriCorps programs, and provides post-secondary scholarships to assist with attending community college. [Showalter and Spiker, 2016]

Career pathways can be tailored toward out-of-school and disconnected youth through four programmatic elements [Kazis, 2016], including:

- *On-ramps* that assist participants without high school credentials
- *Bridge programs* that accelerate academic and work readiness
- Combining paid work with academic preparation

- Industry-specific job training as a way to access new opportunities in post-secondary education and employment.

Implementing a holistic approach that combines career-specific training and work experience, support services, personal development, and academic instruction provides the best formula for program participants to move past the summer program to affect long-term positive change. [Hossain and Bloom, 2015; Showalter and Spiker, 2016] By observing at the sites and interviewing staff and participants, assessments can now be made on how well local projects combine the components needed to be most effective. Informed by this review of literature, the research team will examine implementation of Minnesota’s TANF Summer Youth Work Experience programs.

See Appendix A for a reference list of sources cited in this section.



## Program description

Each year the TANF Youth Innovation project offers some of the youth enrolled in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) subsidized job placements and encourages them to participate in career pathways to self-sufficiency. These opportunities are meant to improve future job prospects, and allow youth to develop work and other life skills that would otherwise be unavailable to them.

In 2018, the department awarded \$1.3 million to DEED to contract with 10 Employment Services providers to enroll a proposed 1,000 youth over the calendar year.<sup>1</sup> To be eligible for enrollment in TANF Summer Youth, they had to be either:

- Teen parents ages 16 to 24, directly receiving MFIP benefits, or
- Younger youth ages 14 to 18, who are on a grant in an MFIP household.

DEED, as the state's principal economic development agency for programs that provide training and support services for youth, has a mandate to utilize existing youth projects to provide work experience to teen parents and younger youth on an MFIP cash grant. The program adopts Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) definition of work experience as "work experiences are a planned and structured learning experience that takes place in a workplace for a limited period of time. Work experience may be paid or unpaid, as appropriate." Types of work experiences include the following categories:

- Summer employment and other employment opportunities throughout the school year
- Pre-apprenticeship programs
- Internships, job shadowing, and on-the-job training opportunities.

DEED administers Workforce One, a web-based case management application that TANF Summer Youth providers use to track program enrollment and expenses, which subsequently shares information with the department. DEED also helps assess youth for program eligibility and provides ongoing technical assistance and support to sites. For its part, the department provides funding, contract management, and evaluation for TANF Summer Youth.

This report includes findings from department evaluators who contacted and collected data from county agencies and Employment Service providers operating TANF Summer Youth programming in 2018. The report includes a description of the evaluation intervention, a narrative of a few TANF Summer Youth sites, data on participating youth, and concludes with a discussion of challenges identified and recommendations for future years' programming.

## Evaluation methodology

The purpose of this evaluation study is to document how TANF Summer Youth is operating 10 years after being launched as a pilot program. As each program site has flexibility in deciding what services are

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the initial 10 program sites identified by DEED, in August 2018 approximately \$70,000 was awarded to the Boys and Girls Club to serve additional youth. This program site and its 27 participants are not included in the results of this evaluation.

provided, where, and for whom, this evaluation examined the diversity among programs along with the experience of program staff and participants. The research questions guiding this study are:

- How many youth participate, what services do they receive, and the demographic characteristics of youth who participate?
- What is the experience of youth participating in the project?
- How do Employment Service providers operationalize the program, and what activities are funded?
- What are the challenges and lessons learned?

Data collection activities included interviews with job counselors and managers, focus groups with program youth, and an administrative data review. Interviews with the staff collected information on how each site runs the program, how they work with employers, and what posed operational challenges. Focus groups gathered the perspectives of participants and their experience with the program. The EAESD Research Unit developed a set of open-ended interview questions, and prior to a focus group obtained the consent of every youth who chose to participate. Participants under age 18 were required to have parents or guardians sign a consent form on their behalf prior to their participation. In total, the team conducted three focus groups, travelled to four sites,<sup>2</sup> and interviewed more than 25 staff from all 10 program sites. After interviews and focus groups were conducted, MFIP program and DEED administrative data were gathered and analyzed.

### Limitations of the study

This study provides a point-in-time view of TANF Summer Youth activity through administrative data. As this is the first year in which TANF Summer Youth was tracked as a separate program in DEED's Workforce One database, there is limited ability to track participants over time to determine any relationship between program participation and longer-term life outcomes.

The main limitation of the focus groups is the sample size obtained. The initial goal was to conduct focus groups with about 96 youth from both the teen parent and younger youth participants. This number was based on the goal of reaching about 1,000 youth through the program, but in reality, in August 2018, only 269 were enrolled in TANF Summer Youth. Thus, interviewing 96 youth was not possible because few sites had their programs fully active at the time of the focus groups (August - September). The sites in the Twin Cities metro area were wrapping up their TANF Youth Innovation Project, while more rural program sites had either wrapped up for the year or faced difficulties in bringing together youth participants from across a wider geographic dispersion of employers and program offices. In total, 16 youth across three program sites were interviewed as part of focus groups conducted for this evaluation.

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<sup>2</sup> Minneapolis Employment and Training, Tree Trust, Anoka and Ramsey counties: HIRED and Ramsey Workforce Solutions.

## Selected program site descriptions

Each TANF Summer Youth program site operates differently, as sites have flexibility in how to structure programs and in what services youth receive. Some sites operated TANF Summer Youth as a distinct program with its own staff and services, while other sites had a more generalized umbrella of services for disadvantaged youth, used to serve and track outcomes for youth who might not otherwise be able to be serve. The following section highlights a small selection of the 2018 TANF Summer Youth sites to illustrate the range and complexity of programming across Minnesota. Table 1 highlights the area serviced by each TANF Summer Youth provider in 2018. Web links to additional information on all 10 TANF Summer Youth sites is in Appendix B.

**Table 1. 2018 TANF Summer Youth program sites and areas of service**

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Area of service</b>
Anoka County Job Training Center	Anoka County
Career Solutions	St. Cloud, serves Stearns and Benton counties
Central MN Jobs and Training Services	Monticello, serves 11 counties in central MN
Minneapolis Employment and Training <sup>1</sup>	Minneapolis
Minnesota Valley Action Council / South Central Workforce Council	Mankato, serves nine counties in south central MN
Ramsey County Workforce Solutions <sup>2</sup>	Ramsey County
Rural MN CEP, Inc.	Detroit Lakes, serves 19 counties in north central MN
Tree Trust	St. Louis Park, serves Hennepin, Dakota, Scott and Washington counties
Southwest MN Private Industry Council	Marshall, serves 14 counties in southwest MN
Workforce Development, Inc.	Rochester, serves 10 counties in southeast MN

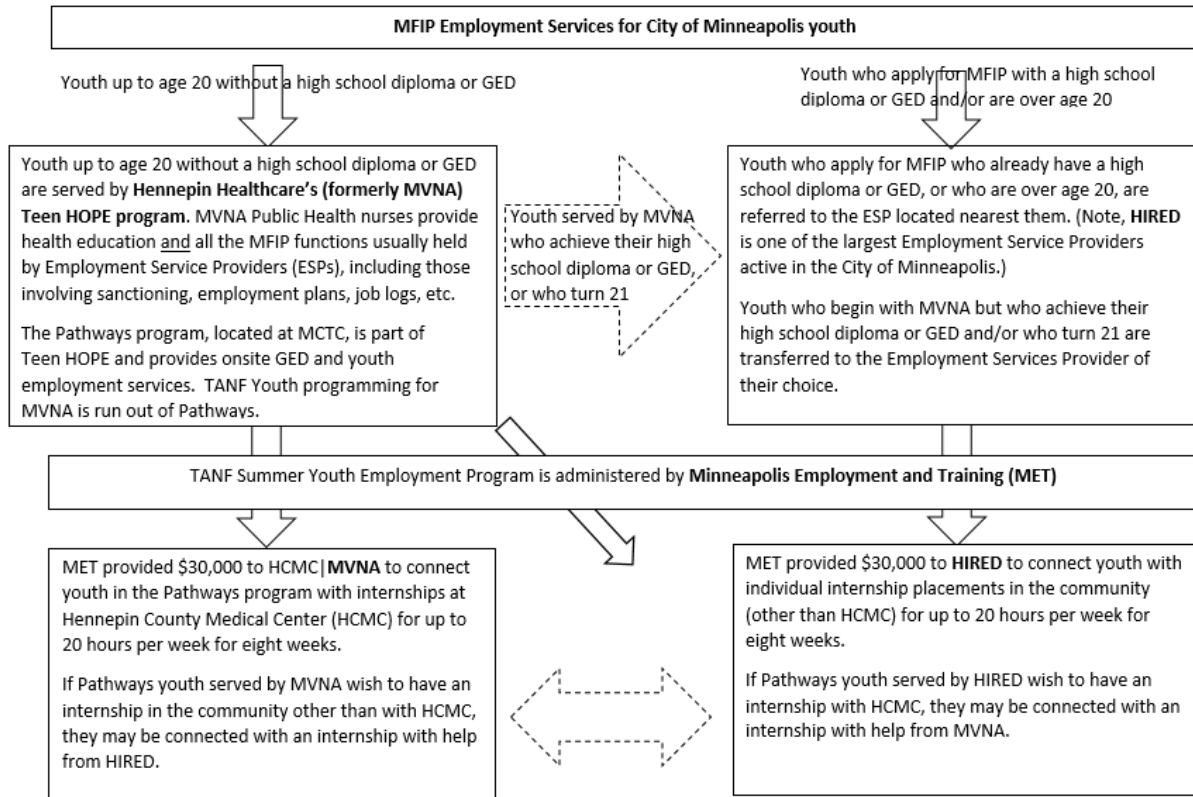
<sup>1</sup>Also includes youth served by Minnesota Visiting Nurse Agency and HIRED, Hennepin County

<sup>2</sup>Also includes youth served by HIRED, Ramsey County

### Minneapolis Employment and Training (MET)

Minneapolis Employment and Training is by far the largest provider implementing the TANF Youth Innovation Project, serving Minneapolis youth. MET’s programming is complex when analyzing the number of organizations and programs that interact with youth enrolled in TANF Summer Youth. Depending on a youth’s education and parental status, may be assisted by HIRED and/or Minnesota Visiting Nurse Association (MVNA) staff while enrolled in TANF Summer Youth. To better understand how MET administers the program, Figure 1 illustrates the different ways youth may enroll in and experience TANF Summer Youth at the site.

**Figure1: Illustration of TANF Summer Youth enrollment and services through MET**



Youth in an MFIP household who have no children are served by the STEP-UP program which primarily serves first-generation immigrants. Youth who have their own MFIP case or applying for MFIP are referred to MVNA if up to 20 years old and do not have a high school diploma or GED. If they are over age 20 and have a high school diploma or GED, they are referred to the Employment Service provider nearest to them.

The formalized collaboration with Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC) resulted in nine youth being placed in internships with the medical center in 2018. Minnesota Employment and Training Services also helped place youth in a barista training program, in the Cookie Cart shop in the Hennepin County government building, and in child care and certified nursing assistant positions, among others. In addition, MET offered opportunities such as work readiness training to help interns integrate their career exposure with post-secondary education and career planning. MET and HIRED provide other wraparound services to participants such as connecting them with child care providers, connect new mothers with nurses, provide bus and gas passes for transportation, and assist them meet their education goals such as earning a high school diploma or GED.

## Anoka County

Anoka County administers TANF Summer Youth directly so that the program aligns with and is embedded in existing programs that serve disadvantaged and disconnected youth. It is tailored to support younger youth 14-18 years old because the older youth and teen parents are served through Anoka County’s traditional MFIP work experience program, under the *Empower* umbrella (see Figure 2). Youth participating in the program are generally still in school and are looking for their first work experience.

The program operated from July through the end of August 2018 for six weeks. However, some youth plan to stay in the program until December as long as program funds remain.

**Figure 2: Work-related programs for youth administered by Anoka County in 2018**

Anoka County Empower programs for youth				
<b>TANF Summer Youth</b> Focused on 14-16 year old, TANF household, for first work experience	<b>MFIP Work Experience</b> Tracked ES activity for youth 18 - 24 and for teen parents	<b>WIOA Youth</b> Paid work experience for WIOA priority young adults	<b>Youth on the Move</b> Paid work experience for youth with disabilities	<b>Employment for All</b> Career training for youth with disabilities ages 18-21

Younger youth participate in an intensive orientation because for those aged 14-15 the summer work experience is often their first job. After orientation, youth are provided with two training opportunities, a:

- 101 crash course in building a resume
- Financial literacy class facilitated by the University of Minnesota.

The financial class includes information on budgeting and opening a bank account. Attendees of these trainings receive a \$25 gift card for participating.

Youth are encouraged to suggest and provide input on potential job matches for the program. The range of job sectors include custodial and cleaning jobs for younger youth, senior living and child care facilities for older youth. After a performance evaluation two weeks after placement, youth who score above average on their communication skills, punctuality, team work, and other skills received a pay increase of .50 an hour.

At the end of each youth’s work experience, Anoka County’s TANF Summer Youth conducts a final review to discuss performance: What went well, what skills the youth developed, and what still needs improvement. Staff also assist youth in how to describe their work experience in a resume. Anoka County is able to help youth with transportation to and from work by issuing bus or gas passes. If youth do not have clothing that meets an employer’s dress code, TANF Summer Youth staff will help pay for new uniforms or professional attire.

## Tree Trust

Tree Trust is another Employment Service provider that serves youth who live in Dakota, Washington, or suburban Hennepin counties, not including Minneapolis. This provider offers two work experience opportunities: Conservation Corps work and individual site internships. Youth who enjoy working outdoors have opportunities to work on a conservation corps site, and those who want to work in an indoor setting are placed in a field that appeals to them. As part of the Youth Conservation Corps, participants work with crew leaders outside to complete park improvement projects that have real, lasting value to the community, including building retaining walls and staircases, installing paver patios and planting trees. Job counselors arrange transportation. Participants enrolled in individual employment experiences are placed in jobs in schools, nonprofit organizations, and businesses throughout the Twin Cities, working in retail, food service, child care, custodial, and administrative assistants. The site makes efforts to attract new employers to meet the geographic and interest needs of the referred youth. In general, participants work an average of 20 hours per week for nine weeks from mid-June to mid-August. Youth placed in work experience through Tree Trust have additional opportunities to earn high school academic credit or, if the work placement is directly related to a youth's post-secondary education career path, college credit. Each of these employment opportunities provide an experience where youth earn wages with a possibility for a raise, gain transferable skills for future jobs, and acquire work ethics.

## Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Program (CEP)

Rural Minnesota CEP is a nonprofit corporation providing workforce development services in a 19-county area in north central and west central Minnesota (see Figure 3). The agency is also the MFIP Employment Service provider for 18 counties (not including Beltrami County) and operates an additional seven workforce centers, and one mobile workforce center. As these counties' MFIP provider, Rural CEP identifies youth from its caseload who may be eligible for TANF Summer Youth. Similar to past years, in 2018, it served 10 youth.

**Figure 3: Rural CEP workforce development service area<sup>1</sup>**



Source: Rural Minn. CEP, retrieved from <http://www.rmcep.com/>

<sup>1</sup> Rural CEP does not provide MFIP ES services to Beltrami County

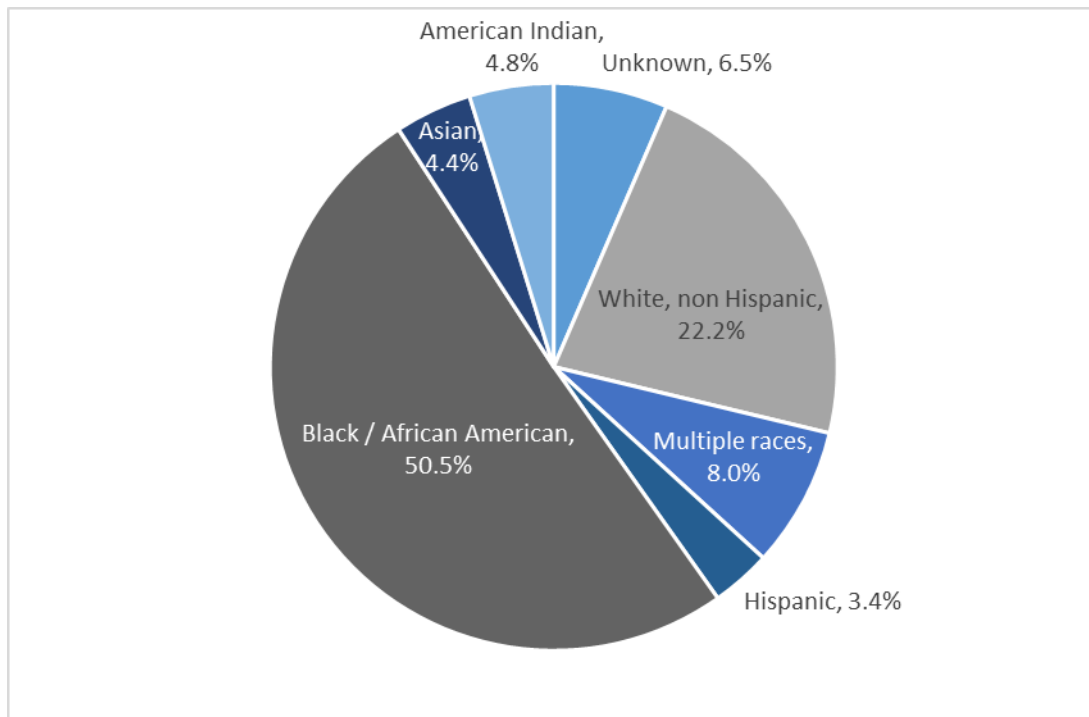
Rural Minn. CEP considers TANF Summer Youth as not a distinct set of services but a funding stream which supports youth funded through two larger employment programs: The federal WIOA Youth and the state-funded Minn. Youth programs. While both programs offer paid and unpaid work experience, work readiness, life skills and career pathways, the main distinction is that Minn. Youth allows services to in-school youth whereas WIOA Youth targets out-of-school and dislocated youth. In addition, Minn. Youth allows participant enrollment in stand-alone programs as well as additional opportunities for year-round employment if funding is available. Teen parents in Minn. Youth can be co-enrolled in TANF Summer Youth. As such, participants are often not aware of the specific program they are enrolled in, other than MFIP. As one Rural CEP staff summarized the impact of TANF Summer Youth: “If we didn’t have the program there’d be 10 fewer youth served.”

The agency’s outreach to eligible youth is operationalized through youth coordinators who visit schools to present their career planning services and work experience opportunities. Youth meet with job counselors for an interest inventory and assessment and look at work experience placements in the community, and discuss child care and transportation challenges that need to be addressed for a placement to be successful. Often, providing transportation and child care is the biggest challenge. In addition to having youth coordinators visit schools, Rural CEP has a “mobile workforce service” that travels to youth, when needed.

## Administrative data findings

Administrative data from DEED and the department were analyzed in February 2019 for calendar year 2018 participants in TANF Summer Youth. The program served 414 youth in 2018, of which 301 (72.9 percent) were female and 112 (27.1 percent) were male. Half of all participants were Black/African-American, while 92 (22.2 percent) were white, non-Hispanic. All other participants identified as American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, multi-racial, or had unknown race/ethnicity. Figure 4 shows the proportion of TANF Summer Youth participants by race and ethnicity categories derived from DEED Workforce One data.

**Figure 4: Race and ethnicity of TANF Summer Youth participants**





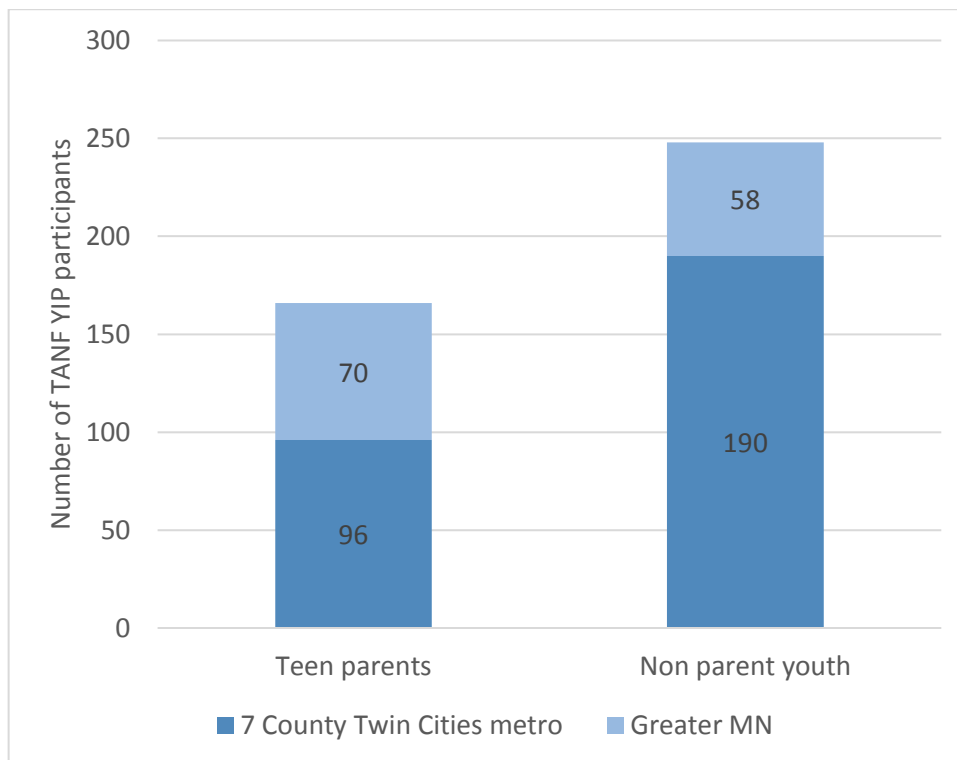
More than half (57.0 percent) of participants served were under 18 years old, and 166 (40.1 percent) were parents (Table 2). All but five of the 166 parents in TANF Summer Youth were age 18 or older.

**Table 2: Age and parental status of TANF Summer Youth participants**

Age of participant at TANF Summer Youth enrollment	Not a parent	Is a parent	Total
18 – 24	17	161	177
Under 18	231	5	236
Total	248	166	414

Of the parents enrolled in TANF Summer Youth, 96 (57.8 percent) were served in the seven-county Twin Cities metro area, compared with 70 (42.4 percent) served in greater Minnesota. In contrast, 190 (76.6 percent) of the 248 non-parents were served in the seven-county Twin Cities metro area. Although it is possible these differences reflect larger rural versus urban birth rates, another reason for this discrepancy is that TANF Summer Youth sites served populations that its year-round programs do not focus as heavily on. If the latter is true, the differences shown in Figure 5 may suggest that the Twin Cities metro area has more robust year-round programs for parents and greater Minnesota sites have more services aimed at non-parenting youth; TANF Summer Youth helps balance services for different youth across the state.

**Figure 5: Service areas for parenting versus non-parenting youth**

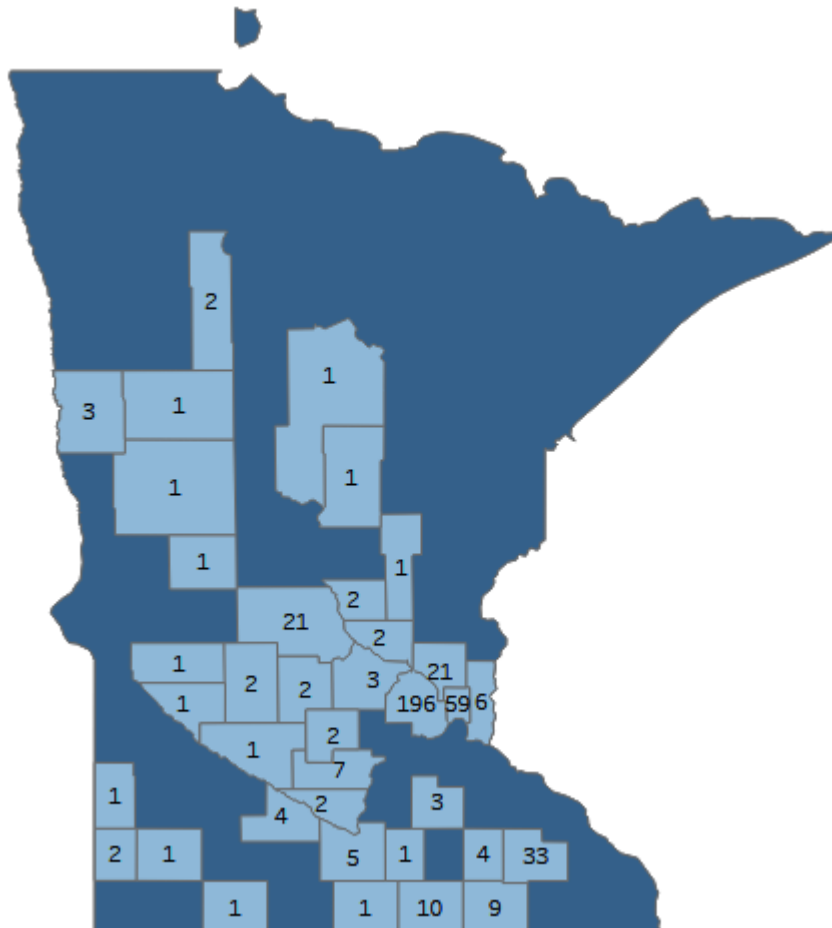


More than two-thirds of TANF Summer Youth participants were served in the seven-county Twin Cities metro area, with the remaining third served across 33 counties in greater Minnesota. Table 3 lists the counties with the largest numbers of TANF Summer Youth participants; Figure 6 maps the number of youth served across Minnesota in 2018.

**Table 3: TANF Summer Youth participants, by county**

	County	Number of youth	Percentage of total
1	Hennepin	196	47.3%
2	Ramsey	59	14.3%
3	Olmsted	33	8.0%
4	Stearns	21	5.1%
5	Anoka	21	5.1%
6	All others	84	20.3%
	Total	414	100.0%

**Figure 6: Map showing number of youth by county**

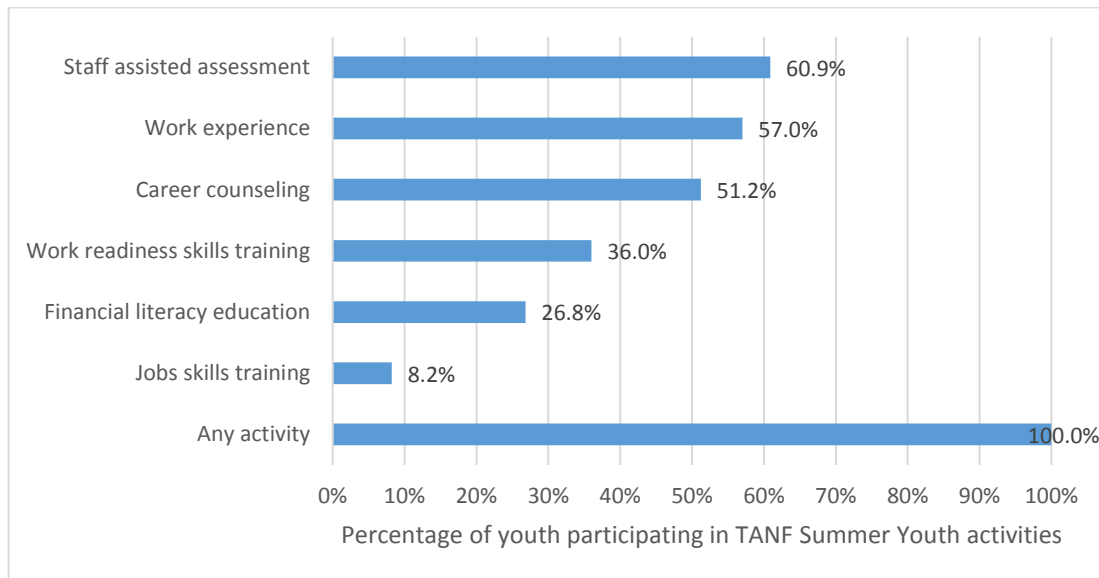


The number of youth served by providers ranged from 155 in Minneapolis Employment and Training to seven served by the Southwest Minn. Private Industry Council (Table 4). Five types of activities are tracked by TANF Summer Youth providers: Career counseling, financial literacy education, career-specific job skills training, staff-assisted assessments of personal and professional interests and abilities, work readiness skills training, and work experience (such as job placements and internships). While all youth participated in at least one of these activities, only 236 (57.0 percent) were assisted in getting a work experience placement. Figure 7 shows the percentage who participated in each type of program activity in 2018.

**Table 4: TANF Summer Youth participants by provider**

	Provider	Number of youth	Percentage of total
1	Minneapolis Employment & Training	155	37.4%
2	Workforce Development, Inc.	59	14.3%
3	Ramsey County Workforce Solutions	56	13.5%
4	Tree Trust	50	12.1%
5	Career Solutions	23	5.6%
6	Anoka County Job Training Center	20	4.8%
7	MN Valley Action Council	20	4.8%
8	Central MN Jobs and Training Services	14	3.4%
9	Rural Minnesota CEP, Inc.	10	2.4%
10	SW MN Private Industry Council	7	1.7%
	Total	414	100.0%

**Figure 7: TANF Summer Youth activities**



For those 236 youth who participated in a work experience placement, the hourly wage ranged from \$9.56 to more than \$15.00, with an average of \$10.95 across participants. Hours worked per week varied from two to 29, with an average of 21.1 hours for TANF youth enrolled in work experience activities.

TANF Summer Youth worked for a variety of employers and performed a range of job duties. As shown in Table 5, some of the more common jobs included recreation, teaching assistants, and office/administrative.

**Table 5: Job titles for youth with a work experience placement**

	<b>Job type</b>	<b>Number of youth</b>	<b>Percentage of youth with work experience</b>
<b>1</b>	Recreation	57	24.2%
<b>2</b>	Teacher assistants	18	7.6%
<b>3</b>	Office and administrative	17	7.2%
<b>4</b>	Landscaping and grounds keeping	16	6.8%
<b>5</b>	Child care or preschool teachers	11	4.7%
<b>6</b>	Janitors and cleaners (not including maids and housekeeping cleaners)	9	3.8%
<b>7</b>	Production	8	3.4%
<b>8</b>	Retail Salespersons	8	3.4%
<b>9</b>	Receptionists and information clerks	5	2.1%
<b>10</b>	Reporters and correspondents	4	1.7%
	All others	172	35.2%

## Focus group findings

EAESD Research Unit staff conducted three focus groups with TANF Summer Youth participants. The groups were held in the Twin Cities metro area and included youth served by the following ES providers:

- Ten teen parents served by Minneapolis Employment and Training, including those served by MVNA/HCMC and HIRED
- Four younger youth served by Tree Trust included a visit to youth's park restoration project
- Two teen parents served by Ramsey County Workforce Solutions were contracted through HIRED.

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*"They ask you 'What do you like? What are you interested in? How can we help you?' They put me through nursing school."*  
–Youth in focus group

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While Tree Trust gives its participants work experience repairing and improving public spaces, youth from the other sites primarily worked in administrative, child care, or health care related placements. At Minneapolis Employment and Training, several youth who participated in a focus group were placed in positions in Hennepin County Medical Center in a variety of administrative and health care positions, while other participants mentioned positions in child care, print production and coffee/food service. Some youth placed in entry-level administrative positions said they felt like they were given tasks that full-time staff did not want or did not have time to do, but said they did not mind this as part of the work experience; they indicated that the wages and on-the-job learning and resume-building outweighed this aspect. Across the focus groups, youth said they felt comfortable and respected in their positions.

All youth who participated in focus groups completed a staff-assisted assessment to help with career navigation services. While not all youth were placed in their first choice of work experience, most felt they were listened to and able to guide the career pathway and work experience placement processes. Overall, youth said they were satisfied with how self-directed their career planning and work experience was.

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*"It's actually my goal. It's not their goal for me ... They really help you find your goal."*  
–Youth in focus group

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Youth participating in focus groups voiced several common suggestions and points they wished to have considered for how TANF Summer Youth, and MFIP more generally, are administered. These include:

- The importance of flexible scheduling. Having an employer who can accommodate changing schedules and is understanding of child care and transportation issues can make the difference for youth in having a successful work experience.
- The option of awarding academic credit for work experience placements. Many youth who participated in a focus group faced challenges meeting high school or post-secondary education requirements, and additional academic credit may help youth meet their goals for education.

- Allowing, when possible, longer work experience placements and/or allowing for more hours to be worked each week.
- Having MFIP and TANF Summer Youth staff offer consistent information and access to services available to participants. Some youth said that they were not aware of services other youth claimed to have received. Providing participants with a full list of possible resources they may access may ensure consistency and fair access for all youth.
- During focus groups with teen parents, a few participants mentioned that they would like to pursue a career in nursing due to the positive experience and exposure they had with internships.

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*“They want to be here for us. The first step is understand and communicate with us on what we need [and] how it’s going to help us.” – Youth in focus group*

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## Site visits and staff interviews

What TANF Summer Youth programs look like varies from site to site. Some sites (such as Anoka County, Career Solutions and Training and Tree Trust) focused on providing work experience for younger youth (14-17 years old), guiding them through their first work experience, whereas other sites (such as Central Minn. Jobs and Training Services and Workforce Development, Inc.), focused on placing teen parents and older youth in jobs (18-24 years old). Sites also assisted youth attain their high school diploma or equivalent. Larger sites also tailored some work experience and career services to youth with criminal backgrounds who have difficulty gaining employment.

At all 10 sites contacted, the TANF Summer Youth provider was the official employer of record for the youth and directly paid them. With this arrangement, providers indicated that there is more flexibility in scheduling around a youth’s availability than there would be if they worked directly for a private employer. To help motivate participants, some sites implemented a .50 increase after the first few weeks of work experience if they met performance expectations.

Staff working directly with youth frequently mentioned that a key benefit of TANF Summer Youth is that it exposes youth raised in households experiencing generational poverty to work experience.

Anecdotally, positive effects for participating youth included increased self-esteem and confidence, improved work readiness, and the realization that earning income through employment is possible.

Work experience placements typically last between six-10 weeks for 20-40 hours a week. Some jobs continued until December, either because placements happened later in the year, or to support youth enrolled in school with afterhours and weekend job opportunities. Many work experience placements among the sites visited started in August, which service providers attributed to delays in funding.

Site staff suggested that employers agree to participate with TANF Summer Youth, in part because they received benefits from the internships at no cost to them, and have opportunities to hire participants based on satisfactory performances. In some instances, TANF Summer Youth providers paid a prevailing wage for a given industry that was higher than what an employer in a work experience placement would have otherwise paid. A teen parent served by Minneapolis Employment and Training was paid a higher hourly wage for a child care position than what the employer offered to pay after the work experience

placement had concluded. Youth at times turned down positions after their initial placements ended in such instances where the new wage offered by the employer was less than what was paid by the TANF Summer Youth provider.

Most sites offer some sort of career pathway program, either through TANF Summer Youth funds or through WIOA. Career pathway programs varied across sites, but shared common components:

- Assessing a youth's skills and career interests
- Identifying certification programs and/or advanced schooling needed to advance in a chosen career field, and
- Trying to enroll youth in education or training in the identified career and/or place them in a work experience or job shadowing role within the same career field.

Most sites are also able to provide some wraparound services such as limited assistance with transportation and identifying child care resources for teen parents. Some sites can assist youth with paying part of their tuition, and under some circumstances help pay part of their housing expenses. Such services were paid through regular MFIP dollars or supplemental service dollars, depending on the site. Some sites applied for and received supplemental service dollars to provide new services. Ramsey County Workforce Solutions applied for and received funding for driver's license trainings or for textbooks and supplies. However, some sites expressed lack of understanding about the type of activities allowed under TANF Summer Youth, as well as what is or is not allowed as services to be included in a site's grant proposal. Multiple sites had questions about whether funding driver's license services and fees for participants were allowable expenses.

### Eligibility verification and program reporting

Regarding program administration, sites mentioned several important changes that had taken place in how TANF Summer Youth was administered in 2018 compared to prior years. Many of these notable changes involved how participants and program expenses were tracked and reported. These changes include the following:

- Instead of asking DEED to verify eligibility of participants, in 2018, DEED provided guidelines for how to check participant eligibility in the MAXIS computer system used by state and county workers to determine eligibility and issue benefits for public assistance.
- Sites welcomed DEED's assigning TANF Summer Youth its own program code in Workforce One. Staff said this has made tracking participants easier. However, some were uncertain whether they should keep tracking using the original spreadsheet method; multiple sites still maintained a tracking spreadsheet as "backup."
- Providers who did not have direct access to the MAXIS system said that it is a challenge to identify eligible younger youth who are not the applicant for their MFIP case (not head of their household)

In discussing the roles of DEED and the department in relation to their sites, staff from every site expressed satisfaction with DEED's communication and clear guidance. At a higher level conversation, some sites were unclear about DEED's role in relation to the department's and suggested that being under a direct contract with the department might reduce delays in information and create efficiencies.

### Contract length

Managers and job counselors interviewed noted the serious challenges imposed by the program being awarded funds late each year. TANF Summer Youth staff noted that their contracts typically are awarded around May, which leaves the sites with a very short period of time to plan for the program and recruit. Given that it is a summer program, it was suggested that families needed to make decisions about their youth's summer employment no later than early spring.

To provide more predictability and continuity for the program, TANF Summer Youth managers from several sites suggested that the program gets be structured to allow for multi-year funding (such as a two to three year contract). This would allow sites to run a year-round program that is not based on a few months' worth of funding. One site alternatively suggested that the annual award be announced before a new calendar year begins, which would also allow for sufficient time for project planning.

### Other challenges experienced by sites

In addition to the challenges posed by TANF Summer Youth's eligibility verification for younger youth, and by the program's current contract structure, sites shared additional challenges encountered in running the program. These challenges provide opportunities for shared learnings and new strategies to assist both providers and the youth they serve.

- Staff and managers noted there have not been any opportunities for ES providers contracted to share their experience with the program, and lessons learned. There is interest in understanding how different sites are approaching TANF Youth contracts, and what youth program infrastructures each contractor is using.
- Sites serving rural counties emphasized their challenges with recruitment, attributing them to the low unemployment rates. ES providers serving rural areas also stressed the acute shortage of child care centers and transportation, the lack of which greatly limits feasible work experience opportunities.
- Smaller sites, especially those in rural areas, are only able to achieve economies of scale in service delivery through intentional efforts to use the infrastructure of other programs like MFIP, WIOA Youth and Minn. Youth. By leveraging capacities of these similar programs, sites can co-enroll participants and maximize resources.
- Staff also highlighted some of the challenges inherent in serving a younger population who are often in their first professional work environment. Some of these learning hurdles included having youth



report their job time cards to their employment counselor, having youth set up a bank account or ensuring their parents have a bank account, excessive phone usage on the job, and “no call, no show” for work. For younger youth still in school and without a driver’s license, staff said that it can be difficult to work around school schedules and ensure transportation for youth to arrive at orientation and work.

- When addressing the challenges in serving younger youth, staff noted the importance of involving youth’s parents or guardians so the whole family is in agreement about the logistics and importance of the youth’s work experience. Program staff mentioned that parents sometimes ask their youth to babysit siblings in the morning, which may mean they cannot show up for work. Having parents involved improves the entire process, especially for acquiring documentation youth need for work authorization.

## Lessons learned

Drawing from the administrative data, focus group feedback, and insights gained from site visits and staff interviews, several key points emerged. The following are the main lessons learned about Minnesota’s TANF Summer Youth program over the course of this evaluation:

- TANF Summer Youth is often seen as a funding source that can be combined with existing resources and programs; rarely was the program treated as separate in and of itself.
- Even though it was first intended to be a summer program, for many sites TANF Summer Youth does not truly begin until July through August. With such a short window of time for program implementation, more than half of participants were still enrolled in December.
- In 2018, the program had the resources to provide more work experience opportunities and serve more youth overall. Even though TANF Summer Youth assisted more than 400 youth, only a little more than half of them were placed in work experiences. As a result, a sizable portion of the awarded \$1.3 million may go unspent instead of assisting additional youth.
- Counties that contracted with ES providers in the metro area had more resources available to them, a larger variety of employers for work placements, and could subcontract with other agencies to provide specialized services to serve youth who may not be able to be served directly. In contrast, ES providers serving a large number of rural counties faced a different set of challenges that varied from difficulties with establishing eligibility, recruitment issues, a less varied range of employers, to lack of infrastructure.

## Policy recommendations

Building on TANF Summer Youth’s achievements in exposing MFIP youth to employment and providing work readiness skills, there are additional opportunities for continuous improvement within the

program. In light of the findings from this evaluation, the EAESD Research Unit offers the following recommendations:

- Support a contract change to turn TANF Summer Youth into a multi-year contract. This would decrease the department's contract management costs and allow sites to more effectively plan for the program, and would benefit youth with potentially year-round work experience opportunities.
- Engage department and DEED staff in discussing agency roles, as well as consider new models for administering the program.
- Encourage sites to put greater emphasis on providing work experience opportunities for youth. In 2018, only 57 percent of participants had a work experience placement. While wrap-around supplemental services and building life skills is important, ensuring youth get work experience will put their learnings into action and increase youth's earnings. To the extent that this figure is due to limited placement opportunities, sites should continue to recruit new employers and build upon existing employer relationships. If funds allow, sites should consider allowing youth to have longer work experiences. When possible, sites should also encourage and allow for youth to participate in TANF Summer Youth over subsequent summers.
- Strengthen and formalize the relationship TANF Summer Youth has with the WIOA Youth and Minn. Youth programs to reduce administrative inefficiencies, such as accounting and financial burdens, and to maximize resources in serving youth.
- Draft and provide all sites with clear guidelines of what types of activities and services are allowable with program funds. This will assist in sites' grant proposals and give equal access of information to the sites.
- Consider a gathering among the TANF Summer Youth sites so that managers and staff from across Minnesota can share their experiences, challenges and suggestions.
- Plan future efforts to evaluate the long-term effect of TANF Summer Youth on participants with respect to education, employment and income.

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## APPENDIX B: Online resources

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