

## **Career Connections Anoka County Job Training Center (ACJTC)**

### **Overview describing the innovative practice**

The Anoka County Workforce Service Area has a long history of designing creative service strategies that are focused on building capacity in career pathway opportunities for adults in the community. In an effort to support this, the local Workforce Investment Board established a subcommittee charged with assessing opportunities and developing career pathway project proposals. Committee members include key representatives from Anoka Ramsey and Anoka Technical Colleges, Metro North Adult Basic Education, and Anoka County WorkForce Center (Minnesota's one-stop), local WIA and MFIP/TANF leadership. Local employers are also engaged when new career pathway programs are being considered and developed.

Anoka County's Career Connection is designed to provide adults an opportunity to gain valuable skills and competencies that align with job opportunities in the region. Over the course of several years' the partners have been successful in adding new pathways that align with labor market demands. Anoka County Job Training Center has developed a signal entry point for a customer that starts with an orientation which includes an application, information about career pathways and an assessment of each individual's math and reading skills. These results guide the navigator and the individual on the next step which could be remedial training with ABE, GED Jump Start or Career Connection Workshop.

Jump Start is a cohort class with 180 hours of compressed customized instruction taught by Metro North Adult Basic Education to help students successfully complete their GED. A GED or High School Diploma is required to attend the Career Connection Workshop. Career Connections Workshop is a 40 hour comprehensive assessment activity which includes a range of career assessment inventories, career exploration, developing effective time management and communication skills, NCRC, employer tours, financial aid information, and tips on mastering the habits of being a successful student.

Upon completion of Career Connections Workshop, individuals develop their career pathway road map with the support of a navigator. There are currently four funded pathways at Anoka County Job Training Center students can access. They are Certified Nursing Assistant/Home Health Aide, Practical Nursing, Precision Sheet Metal and Office & Administrative Technology.

### **Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)**

The career pathway recognizes the value of aligning education and training programs with employers and industry needs. This model creates opportunities for individuals to attain foundational skills that allow for college success, relevant certifications and connections to employment and advanced training over their working career. The model integrates basic education and training with a focus on credential attainment aligned with high-demand occupations with sustainable wages. The biggest impact on job seekers, no matter what career pathway, is the CONFIDENCE they build. Graduates from the programs leave with pride and a sense of accomplishment. Job seekers that did not think they could pass a college class or obtain their GED are finding with the correct support and encouragement that this is just the beginning of their lifelong learning.

Creating a single entry point for job seekers makes it easier to start a life changing commitment. Job seekers are not always sure what to do next especially when they have been unemployed or feeling stuck in a low paying job. The Career Connection Workshop effectively identifies an appropriate career pathway through assessments and exposure to different careers. Students that complete the training and begin working in an industry that matches their interest have reported greater job satisfaction which increases productivity and job retention.

Graduates are finding employment quickly after obtaining their credential. 39 students have completed the Career Connections Workshop and 29 students have obtained an industry recognized credential in one of the Career Pathways. 23 individuals are working with average starting wage at \$11.98. Two Career Connection Workshops will begin later this month with up to 28 job seekers in each class. The

career pathway training programs will start in August. Outreach efforts are effective as we continue to see a high demand to enroll in the programs.

### **Employer/Community impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)**

Career Connections acts as an effective supply chain for local businesses. By helping low skilled adults improve their foundation skills and earn a credential, we ensure that students qualify for and keep good jobs and close the skills gap for employers by providing skilled workers. Employer partners are identified for each pathway that assist with the training curriculum, provide internships, clinical sites, tours and recruit and hire from the graduating classes. Major employers involved are listed below:

- Nursing Assistant - Volunteers of America, Crest View, Lutheran Social Services, Golden Living Farmstead- Presbyterian Home, Park River Estates and Benedictine Health Center at Innsbruck.
- Practical Nursing - Crest View, Accurate Home Care, Golden Living Center and Benedictine Health Center at Innsbruck
- Precision Sheet Metal - EJ Ajax, Cummings, Bermo, Pentair, Lake Air Metals, Quality Tool, Micron Metal Works, Wrico Tool, Dayton Rogers and temporary services; Aerotek Staffing, Pro Staff, Kelly Services, Masterson, Volt and Atlas
- Office & Administrative Technology - National Sports Center, City of Ramsey, City of Blaine, Mercy Hospital, Anoka Hennepin Credit Union, Aggressive Hydraulics and Anoka Hennepin School District

### **Identification of those involved, including collaborators**

Anoka County Job Training Center, Anoka Ramsey Community College, Anoka Technical College, Metro North Adult Basic Education and local businesses are partnering to provide training opportunities to decrease employment disparities for low income individuals including those receiving public assistance, older workers, minorities and the youth.

### **Leveraging/alignment of outside resources**

Under the leadership of the local board, the partners leverage financial support for this model utilizing existing resources and braiding new resources from such funding sources as the Minnesota Job Skills Partnership Board, MN FastTRAC state funding, Adult Workforce Development funds through DEED, WIA Adult and MFIP innovation funds, private foundation resources from United Way and the State Department of Human Services. Leveraging existing resources and braiding new funds has become a standard business practice which supports sustainability of our collaborative efforts.

The navigator leverages community/outside resources and issues support services as necessary. Community resources and outside vendors include Anoka County Community Action Program for emergency assistance and housing, Federal Transit Administration funds for traveler rides, Free to Be for car repairs, Community Emergency Assistance Program for food or clothing assistance, Alexandria House for safe temporary housing and several other local community agencies.

### **Ideas for replication/lessons learned**

This can be replicated in other areas. Essential components of the career pathway model include:

- Effective outreach and recruitment of public assistance recipients, Veterans, and youth. ACJTC provides employment services to MFIP, DWP and SNAP participants and counselors. This is an excellent partnership and leverages complimentary resources;
- Comprehensive career exploration and counseling prior to training;
- Case management/navigation services, to assist with support services and tuition;
- Hands on experience through lab work, clinical experience, and internships in the training; and
- Strong partnerships and common goals with ABE, Colleges, Workforce Center and Employers.