

MWCA Best Practices
“Dream It. Believe It. Achieve It.”
South Central Minnesota Workforce Council

Overview

The “Dream It. Believe It. Achieve It.” Program utilized funding from the Minnesota Youth Workforce Development Competitive Grant to target services to youth ages 16-24 from communities of color in the nine county area of South Central Minnesota.

Youth were assessed in areas of education, employment, transportation, housing, health, child care and legal issues. Youth worked with an employment counselor one-on-one to address issues and develop strategies in each of these areas. They developed a career plan which emphasizes the importance of staying in school and obtaining their high school diploma, as well as identifying a career goal and the pathway to achieve that career.

A key component of the program was the work experience opportunities. Youth were placed in worksites where they worked an average of 20 hours per week for an average of 12 weeks. The worksite supervisors served as mentors to youth and reinforced the importance of completing school and modeled life skills and positive work habits. At the worksite, youth acquired positive work habits, new job skills, customer service skills, teamwork skills and developed relationships with positive, caring adults.

Youth participated in a variety of project-based activities throughout the year. Youth attended workshops on job search techniques, career exploration, labor market information including demand occupations, value of post-secondary education, entrepreneurial opportunities, goal setting, connections to community resources, life skills training and financial fitness training. Youth participated in field trips including: tours of local business to gain hands on exposure to potential careers in demand occupations and industries in the area; visits to local colleges and universities to learn about post-secondary options and visits to local WorkForce Centers to ensure that all youth are aware of the services available to connect to education and employment opportunities throughout their lifetime.

In addition to providing work readiness activities, work experiences, information on in-demand occupations and career pathways for youth, this program engaged youth and their families, provided cultural awareness to the community and positive role models for youth. Because we recognized the strong family connection in communities of color, parents were invited to participate in the initial meetings for program enrollment as well as the group activities. To increase cultural awareness in the community, worksite supervisors participated in cultural awareness training. The program provided positive role models from communities of color that have overcome adversity to demonstrate that it is possible to achieve their dreams.

Jobseeker Impact

The racial disparities in high school completion rates and unemployment rates among communities of color revealed the need to target services to youth from communities of color. Youth that participated in the program attended a focus group to provide feedback on the services they received. Those youth indicated that they would not have been able to get a job on their own without the help of the program. One youth said, “the program tells you step by step what you need to do to get a job and they don’t teach you that in school.” Several youth stated that the program helped build their confidence and that they never would’ve thought to apply for the job they got through their work experience. As a result of their success at their work experience, several youth have been hired by their employer. In addition, youth with language barriers experienced significant growth in their development when they were able to practice the English language on a regular basis in the context of employment.

"Dream It. Believe It. Achieve It." Final Results State Fiscal Year 2014-2015	# of Youth
Participated in a Work Experience	86
Attained Work Readiness Skills	68
Received Academic Credit	22
Graduated from High School	24
Attended Post-Secondary Education	18
Entered Unsubsidized Employment	14

Community Impact

We heard from several employers that benefited from having a youth from communities of color at their worksite. One employer that mentored a youth with a language barrier explained that the youth gave him a new perspective because he had to articulate and explain tasks differently. That experience helped him make improvements to the company training for all new staff.

By engaging the family members in youth workshops and events, we discovered that parents can benefit from the same work/career readiness information. One parent that attended an event stated that she was inspired to go back to school. She has since graduated from South Central College with a degree in nursing.

Collaborators

Those involved in the "Dream It. Believe It. Achieve It" Program:

- African Family and Education Center
- Greater Mankato Diversity Council
- LA-MANO, Inc. Latin American Multi-Ethnic Association for Networking and Opportunities
- Life-Work Planning Center
- IBEW Local 343
- MRCI WorkSource
- MN Council of Churches Refugee Services
- Mankato Area Adult Basic Education
- Minnesota Valley Action Council
- South Central Service Cooperative
- South Central WorkForce Council
- YWCA Mankato

Leveraging/Alignment of Outside Resources

During the SFY 2014-2015, approximately \$282,000 was identified as match funds. The worksite supervisors volunteered their time to supervise and mentor youth participants. Funding from the Minnesota Youth Program, WIA/WIOA Youth, Adult and FastTRAC supported project participants.

Ideas for Replication/Lessons Learned

During the SFY 2014-2015, about 23% of the participants also had a documented disability so we partnered with MRCI WorkSource to provide specialized programming for youth that are not ready for competitive employment to build their employability skills. We also realized that college is not for everyone and for many foreign born youth hands on occupations are preferred so we provided information on

apprenticeship opportunities in the skilled trades. This project can be sustained and replicated with WIOA Youth and/or Minnesota Youth Program funding.