

MWCA Promising Practices
WDI Outreach Efforts in Rice County

Overview describing the innovative practice

The Faribault WorkForce Center in Rice County has made focused and deliberate outreach to our Latino and Somali community members, customers and potential customers so that we can bring meaningful programs and services to Rice County that will address not only perceived issues but real barriers to employment. We have joined with community partners in their efforts to support our increasingly diverse Immigrant Refugee population of customers and program participants. Our Workforce Development Inc. (WDI) staff members have had meaningful conversations with community members impacted by the success or failure of our programs and services. We have made a point to attend trainings, workshops, and meetings that address diversity and inclusion particularly as it applies to Immigrants and Refugees. We have educated ourselves on both cultural and religious differences so that we can address barriers and meet needs in a culturally sensitive way. Through those efforts we connected with like-minded agencies looking for ways to also make a difference. The partnerships formed are resulting in real collaborations and grant opportunities. Our office is beginning to reflect the diversity of the population we serve. We have a Somali Interpreter/Instructor on staff that is both respected and well liked in this community. He is currently teaching a variety of classes which address specific work readiness concerns for many of our English Language Learning (ELL) customers. In addition, we recently hired two new full time staff through our Tri-City Bridges to the Future program. We are very fortunate to have been able to hire bi-lingual Bridge Mentors who speak Spanish and Somali. All of these focused, deliberate outreach efforts are making a positive impact for our customers.

Job Seeker Impact

Our targeted outreach and specific work readiness classes are developing a more prepared workforce. We believe successful completion of these classes will impact long-term job retention. For Immigrant and Refugee populations, getting through training can be difficult with the barriers that they face on a daily basis. This is why partnerships and shared information is critical to program success. Speaking with job seekers about what matters to them leads to better understanding on our part.

Since the start of the Pathways to Prosperity grant program, we have served over thirty participants. Six more will be enrolled next week. Those who have completed the Bridge Course still come back to class realizing that they have learned a great deal and there is more to learn. Several have earned their Northstar Digital Literacy certificates and OSHA10 certification. The job seekers leaving our programs have greatly improved knowledge of employer expectations. Our Career Counselors are able to offer assistance with assessments, resumes, mock interviewing, on-the-job training opportunities, apprenticeships, and possible funds for training and education. Earlier this summer we began a basic computer class using the Northstar Digital Literacy curriculum. All of these tools are providing our job seekers with greater options and increased likelihood of success.

Employer/Community impact

Local employers in Rice County have expressed a growing sense of frustration at the unpreparedness of their applicant pool. They have a need for job seekers to come in work ready. Our efforts mean that they are benefitting from applicants who now have knowledge of employer's expectations and increased work readiness skills.

Identification of those involved, including collaborators

WDI in Faribault is currently working closely with Rice County Social Services on our targeted outreach programs. We work with many of the same customers and our goals are closely aligned. We also have a pilot program with Hiawathaland Transit using their curriculum and instructor twice a month. They use our office

and our Interpreter to give instruction on becoming a bus driver and passing the written exam. At the end of the class, Hiawathaland hopes that they will have candidates for employment. We work with the Buckham Memorial Library on making Northstar Digital Literacy instruction available to community members through a weekly workshop at the library. Our Tri-City Bridges to the Future grant has many dedicated partners: Healthy Community Initiative (Lead Organization), Faribault Public Schools, ABE, ALC, Rice County Family Services Collaborative, South Central College, Riverland College, South East Technical College, and over 20 local businesses and community organizations. Tri-City wants to have 135 students enrolled by the end of 3 years.

Leveraging/Alignment of outside resources

We are fortunate that we have various funding streams to provide outreach and services for our customers. . We are building relationships with the Somali Resettlement Community, and the Faribault Diversity Council for direct contact with the individuals most in need of our quality programs and services. These organizations are an amazing resource for recruiting potential students and applicants. Collaboration with the funders of most recent Youthprise grant and the Social Innovation Fund has also been valuable as we begin our Tri-City Bridges to the Future program.

Ideas for Replication/lessons learned

Our participation in the Tri-City Leadership Circle, which meets twice a month, reminds me that we are much stronger together. We must continue to collaborate with one another. We really appreciate the concept of working together and not duplicating services. Collectively, we are better able to make more of an impact by keeping the needs of the people and how best to address those needs the priority.