

Program/Initiative Title: **Career Success**  
WDA Name: Dakota Scott

**Overview describing the innovative practice**

The Career Success Program is a Dakota County Community Services collaborative that exposes economically disadvantaged youth (as defined for purposes of WIOA) and those with significant barriers due to family circumstances and/or involvement in the justice system to job-hunting skills and career options, while offering activities that can be added to resumes and job applications. The program is voluntary and is held in 6-8 week sessions in which participants gather weekly for 3 to 4 hours of classroom-type discussions, skill building, site visits, and/or experiential learning. Staff have been developing and building the program over the last year and have conducted three sessions to date.

The first session, was built on curriculum from the organization *Junior Achievement*, with heavy involvement from HyVee grocery store. Participants engaged in lessons focusing on work readiness, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy. The session extended into a Career Exploration workshop at the WorkForce Center, tour of Waterous (mfg. company) and volunteer experience at Feed My Starving Children.

The second session focused on careers in health care which included visits to Fairview Ridges Hospital, Hubert Humphrey Job Corps Center, and Dakota County Technical College (DCTC). These on-site visits developed awareness of the education and skills required to pursue careers in this field. In addition, participants were trained/certified in 1<sup>st</sup> aid/CPR and directed a video showcasing each of their experiences from throughout the session.

The third session exposed participants to careers that are physical, hands-on, and/or require a particular skill set. Staff from the Laborers Training Center came and spoke about various careers and training opportunities in the trades. Participants also received hands-on instruction to operate machinery at Extreme Sandbox which introduced them to the work, careers, and safety precautions related to the heavy equipment industry. Following were tours of St. Paul College, Uponsor, and the Minnesota Zoo. The session wrapped up at DCTC where the culinary instructor from Intermediate School District #917 volunteered her time to help participants prepare, bag, and donate meals to a local youth shelter.

Looking ahead, participants will complete a Beginner Studio Engineering course offered through The Garage (non-profit music venue and recording studio). The hands-on instruction will be taught by a video game composer, recording/live sound engineer, and multi-instrumentalist which will expose participants to music and software systems. The course is approximately 30 hours in length and may offer credit recovery for some.

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

The Career Success Program consists of youth served through Dakota County Social Services-Children and Family Services and Dakota County Community Corrections. The program aims to expose, motivate, and guide the youth they serve, particularly those struggling in school, to jobs and various education/career opportunities available. As a result of the program many of the participants have a better understanding of the types of careers they would like to pursue. Some have received academic credit for completion and others have enrolled in secondary programs. Below is just one story of success to date:

One participant, Sarah was initially hesitant to participate in the group. However, she attended each session and participated in three phases of the Career Success Group. Her caseworker noted this was the most invested she had seen Sarah throughout several years of case management. Sarah received certification in CPR training and toured Fairview Ridges Hospital. She expressed interest in becoming a nurse; however, she was behind a full year in high school and contemplating quitting school to work. She attended a tour of Saint Paul College's Nursing Program, at which time she expressed a stronger interest to enter the medical field. Through Saint Paul College, she was able to register for Gateway College, which will allow her to complete high school while earning college credits. Sarah took the Accuplacer test and excelled in the reading section,

therefore, eliminating two entry level college courses. She expressed the feeling of such accomplishment, stating, "I never thought I would get to go to college." Sarah is scheduled to begin both high school and college courses in August. She is anticipated to graduate in spring of 2018 with 12+ college credits in addition to her high school diploma, at which time she will continue in the Nursing Program.

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

The Career Success program benefits local employers by exposing participants to industries, branding businesses, and expanding the talent pool. This is particularly important as many employers are experiencing workforce shortages and are looking for short and long-term solutions. For example, Hy-Vee - a grocery store chain which is rapidly expanding in the area was actively involved with the program. They have many immediate hiring needs so the exposure provides a win-win scenario. Uponor and Waterous are both manufacturing companies in the area who need people to pursue manufacturing careers but often face an overall negative image of manufacturing careers. The company tours provide an incredible opportunity for youth to see how clean and interesting manufacturing careers are.

Additionally, the volunteer experiences offer opportunities for participants to give back to their communities while developing new skills/interests. In addition, volunteering and involvement in the Career Success program can be added to their resume to support future employment.

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

Dakota County Community Corrections, Social Services, and Workforce Services began collaborating on Career Success last summer and continues pulling in other partners as the effort matures. Below is a list of those who have been involved in the Career Success Program to date:

- Other Dakota County Departments: Dakota County Library
- State Organizations: Minnesota Zoo
- Nonprofits: The Garage, HIREd
- Businesses: Waterous, Uponor, Fairview Ridges Hospital, HyVee, Extreme Sandbox
- Schools/Colleges/Training Programs: DCTC, St. Paul College, Hubert Humphrey Job Corps Center, Laborers Training Center, District #917, participant home school districts
- Volunteer/Non-profits: Feed My Starving Children, C.O.R.E. Drop In Center

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

Community Corrections, Social Services, and Workforce Services each play a unique role in the Career Success Program.

- Community Corrections—Community Corrections provides transportation for participants which eliminates the transportation barrier. They also promote the program, recruit participants, and co-facilitate the group.
- Social Services—Social Services coordinates, schedules session activities, and co-facilitates each group.
- Workforce Services—The Dakota-Scott Youth Committee/Workforce Development Board financially supports portion of the program. Additionally, the board provides leads, contacts and staff time for the Career Success sessions.

Community Partners volunteered their time to the Career Success program by offering tours, presenting information, and/or space. They also offered reduced fees for hands-on experiences, courses, and certifications.

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

The Career Success program is still relatively new so each session provides additional perspectives and ideas to implement moving forward. Here are a few of the lessons learned throughout the development of the program:

- Barriers—When barriers for the youth are eliminated - the likelihood of program participation increases. For example, collaboration allowed us to eliminate the transportation barrier.
- Rapport/Relationship Building—It's important to set the tone early. Many of the youth participants come from different school districts or are not attending school. Allowing time for participants to build relationships has resulted in new friendships and created an overall more positive experience for all. Participants look forward to coming each week to see each other.
- Hands-On /Interactive—Program activities should have a hand-on component to avoid participants losing interest.

- Business/Community Awareness— More work is needed to educate others about disconnected youth in an effort to reduce the stigma surrounding this population.