

Youth on the Move (YOM)

Anoka County Job Training Center

Overview describing the innovative practice

Youth on the Move (YOM) is a collaborative project between Anoka County Job Training Center's Youth Programs and the Disability Employment Initiative teams, a local transition program and vocational rehabilitation services with co-enrollments in the Minnesota Youth Program and DEI. YOM provides work based learning experiences funded through DEI for youth ages 18 through 21. The goal is to serve 20 transition students living in Anoka County in a year-round program. Worksites include the Johnsville Library, Morris Bye and Hamilton Elementary with positions such as administrative, grounds keeping, and custodial positions providing youth work based learning experiences throughout Anoka County. Additional worksites include Little Voyagers Child Care Center, the Rum River Library, Kindercare and Adventures Plus. These sites include work in kitchen/maintenance area, shelving and teacher's assistant.

Students gain access to a Vocational Counselor and a Disability Resource Coordinator who offer career exploration including career assessment, skills identification and individualized career planning. Students will receive work readiness training which entails resume, interviewing, negotiating skills, professional references, and follow-up. They maintain work based learning experiences to assist them in increasing their awareness of career pathway training opportunities and obtaining competitive employment. The Disability Resource Coordinator supports students with advocacy, accommodations, assistive technology, and community resources needed by the student to be successful throughout their work experience. The Counselor will also assist students with other supports such as clothing, transportation or others as needed.

Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)

There are several highly positive outcomes for the young adults with disabilities who participate in YOM. Foremost, the youth who participate in paid short-term employment through this work program have a greater chance of being competitively employed. Research indicates that youth having a competitive paid job in secondary school is the strongest predictor of job success after graduation (Test et. Al., 2009; Wagner et al., 2005; Luecking and Fabian, 2000; Colley and Jamison, 1998). This is critically significant because the employment statistics for people with disabilities has remained at approximately 71% for under and unemployment for over two decades. Another positive impact is youth with disabilities improve their soft skills and by the end of their work experience. They have final draft resumes, cover letters and reference sheets from their supervisors. YOM work experiences are innovative with the practice of guiding students and employers to effectively engage in discussion about disability and the acquisition of appropriate workplace accommodations. This increases the student's realistic understanding of the impact of their disability on their job performance and supports them to develop, advocate and negotiate creative accommodation solutions while being responsive to employer needs. These self-advocacy skills practiced during their work experience generalize to unsubsidized employment. Additionally, students who self-disclose having a disability can access Anoka County Career Pathway Training Programs for demand driven occupations in Health Care, Business Services and Manufacturing or other training opportunities. This could be the next rung on the ladder for individuals whom are not yet ready for competitive employment and/or need more specific skill training.

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

Employers will evaluate work based learning performance which is critical for the student to make improvements when needed and/or receive positive feedback for a job well done.

Employers, supervising youth with disabilities, continue as long term work sites for our students and are vocal advocates and champions for hiring youth and adults with disabilities. These employers are our ambassadors to other employers and the community-at-large who are less familiar with or less sure of the positive

contributions that youth with disabilities as an employee can make. Community businesses, organizations and members witness and interact with youth with disabilities who are now positively engaged in the community as consumers and participants. They eventually realize that people with disabilities are community members who have gifts to offer to the life and economic wellbeing of the community at large.

Identification of those involved, including collaborators

Staff from Anoka County Youth and the Disability Employment Initiative program in conjunction with the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) pilot project with Vocational Rehabilitation Services started in June 2016. From best practices learned from Pre-ETS over the past year, YOM is continuing the effort for those who have disclosed a disability and are needing work based learning experiences to further their ability to obtain competitive employment.

The Disability Resource Coordinator is uniquely positioned as a collaborative partner with the Youth Program Team. This individual brings extensive experience working with transition age youth with disabilities in work based learning and training programs. As a trained and practicing Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, the DRC blends person centered counseling, mentoring the development of self-advocacy and vocational planning throughout working with the youth. The DRC and Youth Program Coordinator facilitate job search workshops as well as set up new worksites and supporting employers as they supervise youth. The Disability Resource Coordinator is very knowledgeable about the agency and community professionals who work with youth with disabilities and regularly refers youth to: the Metropolitan Center for Independent Living, Work Incentive Connections, Disability Linkage Line, ADA Minnesota, PACER, NAMI, RISE, Inc., ARC of Greater Twin Cities and Opportunities Partners. As a member of the Community Transition Interagency Committee and the North Metro Placement Group, the DRC is kept current with events, trainings, job openings and other growth opportunities infusing her interaction with youth.

Leveraging/alignment of outside resources

The Inter-agency and intra-agency collaboration of YOM in conjunction with leveraging resources with the Anoka County Job Training Center's Youth Programs and the Disability Employment Initiative teams has proven to be a best practice for youth with disabilities to gain work experiences and competitive employment.

Anoka County Job Training Center will also leverage new Pre-ETS Outreach funds to education and refer youth to YOM along with aligning a new initiative "Employment for All" to increase competitive employment opportunities for young people with disabilities ages 18 – 21 by developing On the Job Trainings. Collaboration continues to increase with WIOA Title I and IV to decrease employment disparities for individuals with disabilities.

Ideas for replication/lessons learned

YOM continues to provide work based learning opportunities for youth with disabilities and one which can be easily replicated to complement existing partnerships, programming, and aligns with WIOA. With effective training for the work of the Disability Resource Coordinator's role could be replicated to assist youth and adults with disabilities in all work experience programs.