

Program/Initiative Title: **Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC)/ Disability Resource Information (DRI) Training Development**

WDA Name: **Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services, Inc. (CMJTS)**

**Overview describing the innovative practice**

Under Minnesota's Round 5 Adult Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grant, an ongoing effort to better serve people with disabilities and connect them to satisfying and gainful employment, CMJTS adapted a Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC) Level I Training, originally developed by the State of Alaska, as part of that state's DEI grant, to address local needs by incorporating Minnesota-specific resources. In January 2018, the revised training, which incorporated both web-based and in-person classroom training, was delivered to all CMJTS reception/resource room staff, employment specialists, business service coordinators and specialists, regional supervisors, and program managers.

The DRC training empowered CMJTS staff to better serve people with disabilities by ensuring universal access to the WorkForce Center System, identifying reasonable accommodations, ensuring their understanding of and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and helping them become more aware of the various types of disabilities. Because of its potential to benefit WorkForce Center consumers with disabilities, leadership from both Anoka County and the Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council contracted with CMJTS to deliver the training to their staff.

The DRC Level 1 Training was identified as a best practice by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and the U.S. Department of Labor. DEED's Youth Services Team then secured Technical Assistance and Training (TAT) funds from the Department of Labor to further expand upon the training, creating the Disability Resource Information (DRI) Level I Training. The new DRI training consists of five modules, including:

- WIOA and Disability
- Building Confidence Around Disability
- Accessibility for a Diversity of Customers
- Partnerships and Collaboration
- Youth with Disabilities

Each module of the new DRI Level I Training incorporates a learning objective, content, external resources, a glossary of key concepts and terms, as well as an action plan. It is designed for all frontline staff who work with individuals with disabilities, with an emphasis on youth with disabilities, and is now available statewide in an online format ([https://mn.gov/deed/assets/disability-training-strategy\\_tcm1045-341417.docx](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/disability-training-strategy_tcm1045-341417.docx)).

**Jobseeker impact (i.e. benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)**

By increasing staff knowledge and understanding of the many and varied challenges often faced by individuals with disabilities, employment and training staff are better able to provide, and are more invested in providing, the services this population needs to connect with satisfying and gainful employment. More useful and tailored service accommodations can now be made based on an improved understanding of these challenges. Barriers to WorkForce Center services are eliminated, minimized, or circumvented.

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

The business community is now able to benefit from the increased competency of employment and training staff and have the opportunity to better access this talent pool—people with disabilities. Employment and training staff have the knowledge and ability to help employers attract these individuals and make what are often simple accommodations needed to ensure their success. Those businesses who take advantage of this expertise will have a competitive advantage as they compete for a rapidly dwindling supply of available workers.

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

- CMJTS Workforce Development Manager Leslie Wojtowicz and Disability Resource Coordinator Tera Brooks initially adapted the DRC training, which was previously developed by the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB), with their permission. Wojtowicz and Brooks then delivered the adapted DRC training to staff from CMJTS, Anoka County, and the Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council.
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- DEED's Youth Services Team, led by Kay Tracy, secured the Technical Assistance and Training funds needed to take the training to the next level and make it widely available using the online learning format. The new DRI training is now available on DEED's website.

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

- The Alaska Workforce Investment Board developed the original Disability Resource Coordinator training, which was used as the model for CMJTS' training.
- Funds provided by Anoka County and the Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council were used to defray CMJTS' costs associated with the development and delivery of this training.
- DEED accessed Technical Assistance and Training funds from the U.S. Department of Labor to make the expansion and online delivery/hosting of the DRI training possible.

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

The newly-developed DRI training is a prime example of what can be done in a relatively short period to improve workforce services throughout the state by making educational resources widely-available to all partners. Every employment and training agency in Minnesota and beyond now has a cost-free way to ensure staff competence in providing services to people with disabilities. Both existing and new staff have the opportunity to gain this expertise as a result of this cooperation, which occurred not only within our state but reached all the way to Alaska (AWIB) and Chicago (US DOL, Region V).

It is hoped that this cooperative strategy can be replicated and will result in more training availability on additional topics (e.g., cultural competency, on-the-job training contract development, incumbent worker training/employer succession planning, etc.) in the future. This collaboration ultimately maximizes efficiency and ensures that best practices are employed across regions and, in some cases, nationwide to better serve participants and the business community.