

## Program/Initiative Title: **CMJTS' Pre-Employment and Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Project Co-Enrollment Strategy**

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

### **Overview describing the innovative practice**

In SFY 2018, CMJTS received funding from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development's (DEED) Vocational Rehabilitation Services Unit to provide Pre-Employment and Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to secondary school students with disabilities. The goal of Pre-ETS is to make the following five activities available to these students:

- Job exploration counseling
- Work-based learning experiences
- Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education
- Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living
- Instruction in self-advocacy

While Pre-ETS guidelines allowed spending on the provision of "direct services to youth" (e.g., staff time and associated costs) and Auxiliary Aids and Services (e.g., the purchase of technology or other items needed to make adequate accommodations for students with sight or hearing limitations, etc.), the use of grant dollars to fund paid work experience, support services, and participation stipends was prohibited. However, CMJTS believed it was important to include these program enhancements for the following reasons:

- By paying students a small stipend for their participation, Pre-ETS students would benefit from the experience of completing the W-4 and I-9 forms, necessary for employment, and would have the opportunity to experience the positive reinforcement that comes with receiving a paycheck.
- Students, especially students with barriers to success, need the opportunity to participate in paid employment. This experience helps them to understand the financial and social benefits associated with workforce engagement, helps them to develop "hard" and "soft" work skills, and gives them the opportunity to discover their own work preferences (e.g., working outdoors vs. indoors, working independently vs. working as part of a team, etc.).
- Many youth require financial supports to eliminate barriers to participation in employment and training programs. CMJTS believes no person should be prevented from the opportunity due to their inability to afford transportation, work clothes, etc.

Therefore, the CMJTS Youth Team employed a co-enrollment strategy for Pre-ETS participants. Every student who was able to provide the necessary documentation (e.g., proof of social security number, citizenship, etc.) was enrolled into the Minnesota Youth Program (MYP) in addition to the Pre-ETS program. MYP was then used to fund participation stipends. MYP also made support services available to all who were co-enrolled. While budgets didn't allow every Pre-ETS student to take part in this activity, MYP co-enrollment also gave CMJTS the means to fund paid work experience for selected participants from each Pre-ETS cohort.

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

As described above, CMJTS' co-enrollment strategy (into both Pre-ETS and MYP) benefited participants by giving them the opportunity to learn how to complete payroll forms, including the W-4 and I-9. This is something that many young people have no opportunity for prior to their first competitive job. The experience of

completing the forms in a more protected environment serves to reduce anxiety and is expected to reduce potentially costly mistakes later in the students' respective careers.

MYP co-enrollment also greatly enhanced the Pre-ETS program by giving CMJTS the means to offer paid work experience to participants when it was determined that employment was an appropriate activity for that individual. This was a great benefit to students who were not yet ready for competitive employment as well as those students for whom securing competitive employment was difficult due to their rural location, etc. Having the chance to develop hard and soft work skills in a real workplace environment is invaluable, especially for youth with disabilities. The experience can give students career pathway momentum and increase self-assurance by providing them the opportunity to take the focus off of their limitations and instead demonstrate what they can do and achieve.

Finally, CMJTS' co-enrollment strategy benefited Pre-ETS participants by making financial supports (e.g., the provision of gas/transportation assistance, clothing necessary for work, etc.) available. Additionally, these support service funds could be used when background checks were required for work experience participation (e.g., for work in a childcare setting). Without these financial supports, some participants may not have had the opportunity to fully-participate in Pre-ETS and related activities (e.g., work experience).

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

MYP co-enrollment gave Pre-ETS participants the opportunity to benefit from more comprehensive employment and training services. As a result of this strategy, more employers will have the occasion to realize the capacity of people with disabilities have to be productive within their companies. This increased understanding has the potential to give employers a competitive edge when recruiting for future position vacancies. These employers will also have increased opportunities to learn how they can accommodate the individual needs of people with disabilities so they are empowered to achieve success in the workplace and more-effectively contribute to company goals.

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

- Students, parents, and district special education case managers assisted by gathering the documentation required for MYP co-enrollment.
- DEED provided the Workforce One platform, which made co-enrollment a relatively simple and efficient process.
- The DEED Youth Services Team, led by Kay Tracy, and VRS transition specialist, Alyssa Klein, encouraged the co-enrollment strategy to better serve involved youth.
- CMJTS Youth employment specialists worked with each student throughout the MYP co-enrollment process. They also supported the participants and offered guidance as the youth developed and carried out their individual service strategies.

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

MYP participant funds were leveraged to make participation stipends, paid work experience wages, and financial support services available to CMJTS Pre-ETS participants.

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

CMJTS believes co-enrollment will continue to be an effective strategy and will continue to use it as a means of providing more effective and comprehensive services to our participants. This approach will not be limited to Youth Program participants, but will also be used for those individuals involved with Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Public Assistance programs when budgets allow and when co-enrollment will promote goal achievement.