

Program/Initiative Title: Serving Individuals with a Criminal Background  
WDA Name: Southeast Minnesota Workforce Development, Inc.

Southeast Minnesota Workforce Development, Inc. has three new innovative approaches to serving individuals with a criminal background. The first of these approaches is a targeted, member-led Workforce Development Board taskforce entitled the Previously Incarcerated Individual Taskforce.

The mission of the taskforce is to connect employers with potential employees who happen to have a background. The taskforce has two simple goals – educate employers regarding a previously incarcerated workforce and increase the employment of clients coming out of incarceration into jobs and careers that pay a living wage. The taskforce began almost three years ago with eight to ten members. It has now grown to about sixty members representing city, state, county, and federal governmental entities, businesses, community-based organizations, education, workforce development, as well as the previously incarcerated individual themselves.

Recently members have been encouraged to join one of the three newly-formed subcommittees – Employer Engagement, Previously Incarcerated-focus or Communications. While the taskforce meets six times per year, members of the subcommittees meet in between and then present progress reports to the larger group.

The other two approaches involve securing resources through the Pathways to Prosperity Program. One of the funded projects, titled the “River Region Manufacturing Pipeline: Ex-Offender Pathway,” is a unique collaboration designed to assist with filling the hiring needs of the Manufacturing Sector of Southeastern Minnesota, while supporting targeted populations who face multiple barriers to employment. The collaborative applying for this program involves various partners and employers from throughout Regional Development Area #6, serving Goodhue, Wabasha, Winona and Houston Counties. Included in this collaborative is WDA #8-Workforce Development, Inc. (WDI), WDA #18 - Winona WorkForce Center, Hiawatha Valley Adult Basic Education (HVABE)- serving Goodhue and Wabasha Counties, Winona K12 Adult Basic Education (ABE)- serving Winona and Houston Counties, Adult Detention Centers in Goodhue, Wabasha, Winona, and Houston Counties, Minnesota State College Southeast (MSC)-Red Wing and Winona Campuses, Project FINE, serving refugees, immigrants, and those who are ethnically diverse throughout the region, county probation and court staff, county judges, and numerous employers from throughout the river region.

Workforce Development, Inc. is the project lead and is providing programming through a Foundations in Manufacturing Class at each of the Adult Detention Centers in Goodhue, Wabasha, Winona and Houston Counties. This project will expand the talent pool for employment opportunities in the Manufacturing Sector, which is identified in the Regional Development Plan for Region #6. In addition to the training held at the Adult Detention Centers, staff will work with probation officers to offer the credit-based Foundations in Manufacturing classes for those who have left incarceration but are in need of employment. All classes will target populations with barriers to employment, with particular focus in our region on individuals of color, individuals with a criminal record, individuals below the poverty level, and job seekers who are unemployed.

The second Southeast Minnesota project, funded through the Pathways to Prosperity project, is called *Building Carpenters*. The goal of *Building Carpenters* is to recruit people with multiple barriers to employment, especially minorities, women, and the previously incarcerated and provide them with a

short-term training. This short-term training consists of two weeks of Essential Skills followed by training specific to the individual trade. So far classes have focused on the carpentry and laborer's trades. Once students have successfully completed the training, graduates will have access to full-time carpentry and construction employment in careers that start at \$15 - \$21 an hour. These careers offer benefits, pensions, and career growth opportunities.

*Building Carpenters* provides a new and innovative strategy to recruit, train, and employ women, minorities, and persons with a background into the carpentry and construction fields. Carpenters and laborers are in high demand throughout Rochester and the surrounding communities as Destination Medical Center (DMC) transitions from its planning stage into its implementation stage. DMC is a 20-year, \$5.6 billion economic development initiative. The largest in Minnesota's history, DMC is designed to position Minnesota as a global center for the highest quality medical care and to generate high-value jobs, new tax revenue, and businesses. Over the next 20 years, an additional 30,000 jobs are anticipated to be created in and around Rochester. With that growth comes the building of hotels, restaurants, apartment complexes, individual residences, and other commercial buildings. These buildings will be built by the in-demand, residential and commercial carpenters and laborers graduating from the *Building Carpenters* program.

The *Building Carpenters* proposal illustrates the strength of Southeast Minnesota's partnerships, experience, and commitment to successful career pathways. The major partners in the proposal include WDI, North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters, Laborers District Council of MN and ND, Construction Partnership, Inc., Benike Construction, the Diversity Council, Hawthorne Adult Basic Education, the Alliance of Chicanos, Hispanics, and Latin Americans (ACHLA) and a number of other local contractors. These partners have worked together to create two different short-term trainings that lead to employment that pays a family-sustaining wage.