

Overview describing the innovative practice

Learning Thru Sharing was developed with specific goals in mind to benefit English language learners in their search for employment and independence. Learning Thru Sharing provides opportunities for English language learners to participate in hands-on occupation exploration with local companies and organizations. The program provides weekly volunteer opportunities to gain experience performing a variety of job related activities, practicing communication skills and learning good work habits. They also explore a variety of careers through business tours. Having the participants volunteer and share their skills in this manner and visit local businesses has multiple benefits including acclimating to their new community, building relationships, learning about new resources, provides information to help them better determine what career path, and they gain marketable work experience. A summary of the program and personal stories are found on this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MibQE0erU9E> (4 minutes).

Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers) career exploration

Benefits of the program include: gaining experience in a professional setting in communicating effectively through the English language, actively learning soft job skills, meeting people and networking, working as a team, resume building, and applying the skills in becoming a valuable employee.

Speaking English in a Professional Setting: Many of our participants are beginning students in *English as a Second Language* classes. Being out in the community while engaging in a work-based learning experience gives them a chance to use their new language skills in a professional setting. The focus of the work-based learning has been more linguistically rather than rules of grammar and this has been invaluable to the students.

Learning Soft Job Skills: Soft job skills are essential to an employee's success and are transferable. The jobseeker learns interpersonal and communication skills. For example: A good employee knows how to get along with different personality types and how to speak to a supervisor and co-workers effectively. In addition, they learn the importance of listening, teamwork, attitude, leadership and work ethic.

Meeting People & Networking: Many new immigrants have a limited professional social network. Getting out in the community allows the participant to explore new businesses and organizations. This creates an opportunity to build a professional network that will help advance their careers. It has not only been great for the job seeker, but also employers who have greatly benefited from the interactions. The network helps the job seekers learn about new jobs as they open up in the community.

Working as a Team: Our activities are arranged to allow the participants to "Work as a Team". The participants learn about dividing the duties and sharing the responsibilities of a particular job. Many have no prior job experience and find working with the team an enjoyable part of the experience.

Resume Building: So many of our participants do not have a work history which makes developing a resume difficult. Listing volunteer experiences can greatly enhance the resume and cause the job seeker to stand out from other applicants. It also provides the prospective employer with some of the information needed to determine their eligibility for the position.

Become a Valuable Employee: The main goal for our participants is to become an employee that is an asset to the company. Getting to work on time, working with others in a friendly and supportive manner, sharing talents and skills, and being able to communicate effectively are characteristics of a good employee. By providing the participants rewarding opportunities we hope to leave them with a positive attitude towards gaining employment.

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

The Learning through Sharing program has greatly benefited both the job seeker as well as the employer/community. Many of the volunteer sites were introduced to new immigrant populations for the first time through this program. It has resulted in employers and community based organizations being more open

and supportive of new communities. Additionally, the rotating volunteer sites are developed according to the students interests. For example, due to a strong interest in gaining employment in patient care occupations, The Learning Thru Sharing program implemented an educational focus for senior care and vulnerable adult care occupations. We hold a number of classes at a senior dining site and apply work integration with adult individuals with developmental, physical, and other vocational disabilities. This has been a wonderful way to develop greater interest in occupations that are in high demand in our region.

Identification of those involved, including collaborators

Learning Thru Sharing was the result of a collaborative initiative between Southwest Adult Basic Education and the Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council. Additionally, multiple community based organizations and businesses are providing worksites and business tours throughout the year. The mission is to make it possible for our participants to achieve a better life for themselves and their families. This is being done by supplying them with the support and skills needed to become valued employees and self-sustaining members of the Marshall area workforce and community.

Leveraging/alignment of outside resources

Learning Thru Sharing works with the following volunteer sites: Ruby's Pantry, Thrift store, Marshall Lyon County Museum, Habitat for Humanity's ReStore, Adult Basic Education Office, Marshall-Lyon County Library, and Boulder Estates.

Ideas for replication/lessons learned

Learning Thru Sharing has opened an inspiring path to many individuals' lives. It has also inspired other grants to help bridge and place individuals into employment. We have watched students and participants obtain employment, some from the volunteer sites, resulting in a positive impact in their families and our community. We would like to see other communities aware of the benefits of Learning Thru Sharing.

