

BEST PRACTICES: REACHING YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

Agency: Stearns-Benton Employment & Training Council

Service Area: Stearns and Benton Counties

Coordination of activities between Employment and Training Staff and Human and Health Services Staff to Improve Services to Youth Aging Out of Foster Care.

Overview of Program: Stearns-Benton Employment & Training Council (SBETC) staff provide individualized employment and training services to youth. Youth receive one-on-one attention guiding them through the steps of career planning, secondary school completion, post-secondary enrollment and completion, community referrals, housing, and job seeking/keeping skills. Employability skill training is provided to youth ages 14 to 17 who participate in CareerONE.

Outreach of Youth in Foster Care/Aging Out of Foster Care: Contact by phone and mailings are provided to local child and youth serving agencies, youth housing programs, area schools and alternative schools, and the county's Department of Human Services where all divisions of the department, i.e., child services, probation, child protection, etc., receive information about available youth services. Information is provided through brochures, presentations, phone calls to individual youth workers, and participating at child and youth serving agency meetings. Presentations to groups of youth are provided upon request. SBETC youth staff serve on the local youth council, the Great River Regional Perkins Implementation Team and attend the Child and Youth Serving Agency meetings.

Services Provided: Year round services are provided to youth, ages 17 to 21, and is delivered in an individualized one-on-one model in a non-threatening environment by a youth career planner. Career planning, researching targeted industries and in demand occupations along with a career assessment are provided. The career assessment provides the youth's results of their general educational development, 12 aptitudes, interests, temperaments, learning style and understanding of employer needs. Their results are matched into an occupational data base showing them pathways and occupations to consider. They also work toward an ACT National Career Readiness® Certificate while participating. Labor market information, postsecondary enrollment, financial aid preparation, scholarship search and application, DHS Education Training Vouchers, open computer lab, resume writing, interviewing skills, budgeting, housing referrals, locating child care, and transportation, are all areas where one-on-one attention is provided to the youth. The career planner will attend wrap meetings, IEP meetings, housing meetings, etc., as necessary. Contact with the youth is as often as the youth needs for them to be successful in their career plan.

CareerONE is provided during the summer for 16 to 22 days to youth 14 to 17 years of age. CareerONE is an employability skills training program. Youth attend CareerONE four days a week for 7.5 hours a day. The youth are matched into teams of 8 and led by a caring adult. The youth develop team building skills, SCANSkills, and employability skills. The youth work toward achieving the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate®, Junior Achievement Finance Park® Certificate, Minnesota Youth@Work Talking Safety® Certificate, and the WorkForceU Employability Skills and Safety Certificate. Work projects throughout communities in Stearns and Benton counties are completed by the teams. The youth develop their own resume and

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career pathway chart along with reflecting and journaling about their experiences. Youth work toward earning a daily stipend along with safety and employability incentives. Upon successful completion of CareerONE youth are paid their earned stipend and incentives.

Impact on Youth in Foster Care/Youth Aging out of Foster Care: Youth in the foster care system or aging out are referred by county and school social workers. The foster youth who decide they want employment and training services to be a part of their transition plan have access to individualized one-on-one career planning services. A comprehensive assessment of their transition and future employment/education needs takes place. An individualized goal plan is developed and referrals for additional community services may be made. Youth are mentored through their plan and are assisted with applying for housing, continuing their education, financial aid, education training vouchers, scholarships, food support, transportation needs, etc. Assistance with budgeting is a regular ongoing service. During CareerONE foster youth learn the necessary skills to help them look for and keep employment. The team building component allows the youth to challenge and overcome their individual fears, along with learning how to work well with others. They also learn financial budgeting which will help them in their transition from a system to being on their own. Each successful foster youth is able to emerge into the workforce and become an important part of their community.

Community Impact: The youth who participate in the CareerONE program interact with many leaders and employees from community agencies and organizations. They complete work projects for these agencies and see the importance of their skills being needed in the community. Because of this, the youth will “give back” to the community outside of CareerONE by volunteering, being an outstanding citizen and being a reliable employee. Youth who participate year round are provided support during their post-secondary training and finding employment upon completion of training. These young adults will give back to their communities as an employee with credentialed skills and be able to compete in the global workplace. Many successful foster youth will mentor other foster youth. They will help them access programs to assist them with their training and employment needs.

Identification of Partners and Resources Leveraged: Youth in foster care or aging out of foster care are eligible for services through the Workforce Investment Act and/or the Minnesota Youth Program. Stearns-Benton Employment & Training Council implements both of these programs for Stearns and Benton counties. A comprehensive set of services are provided to youth based on individual need. Services from career assessment to employability skills training to career counseling/case management to assistance with post-secondary education and looking for employment. Services are delivered through the WorkforceU system.

Partners:

Stearns and Benton County human services and juvenile probation staff
Area school district guidance counselors, social workers, principals, etc.
Minnesota WorkForce Center–St. Cloud staff
Catholic Charities supported housing for youth SAIL/SHY program staff
Area College Bound/TRIO program staff

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For additional information on program services, contact:

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