

AT A GLANCE

Funding Amount:
\$300,000 per year for three years

Funding Source:
TANF Innovation funds from the Minnesota Department of Human Services

Average Cost Per Participant:
\$ 2,000 per youth

Number Served per year:
Approximately 150

Youth From Communities of Color Served:
Approximately 55%

Youth Attaining Work Readiness Skills:
Approximately 90%

For More Information:

Minnesota Department of
Employment and Economic
Development
332 Minnesota St., Suite E-200
St. Paul, MN 55101

Kay Tracy, Director
Office of Youth Development
Kay.Tracy@state.mn.us or
651.259.7555

Lynn Douma, Program
Coordinator
Office of Youth Development
Lynn.Douma@state.mn.us or
651.259.7536

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Minnesota TANF Innovation Summer Project

The TANF Innovation Summer Project is a partnership between the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, and the Minnesota Workforce Council Association (MWCA) to provide structured work experiences, direct services to youth, and related support services to youth receiving Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) benefits.

The project serves two groups of youth:

- Teen parents, ages 16-24, who are receiving cash MFIP benefits; and
- Younger youth, ages 14-18, who are on the grant in MFIP households.

Many of those served have little or no previous work experience. The TANF Innovation Summer Project youth service providers collaborate with county financial workers and MFIP Employment Service Providers for recruitment of youth and to ensure continuity of the MFIP Employment Plan as appropriate. Work readiness skills are evaluated through worksite evaluations measuring performance in the workplace as the participants progress through the project.

Minnesota's TANF Innovation Summer Project is an effort to improve MFIP (TANF) outcomes, particularly the Work Participation Rates (WPR) for the teen parent target group through participation in a structured summer youth employment program. The project also enhances employability and employment outcomes for both groups and helps participants transition from school to work and post-secondary education.

The project supports the collaboration between TANF and WIOA programs articulated by the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (ACF). ACF encourages State and local TANF agencies to work with State and Local Workforce Investment Boards to explore ways to combine resources in developing or expanding subsidized employment programs. Where appropriate, programs may co-enroll youth in the TANF and applicable WIOA programs so that participants in TANF-funded subsidized employment opportunities can benefit from additional WIOA services such as supportive services, occupational skills training, and other relevant services.

The project also supports Department of Labor priorities outlined in the proposed WIOA regulations:

- Employer engagement – employers will learn more about the employment potential of youth and be more likely to engage in present and future employment and training efforts
- Work-based learning – youth will understand the relevance of their education in the workplace as they engage in real work
- Job and career results – youth will experience what it means to be in the workplace, including learning the “soft skills” necessary to succeed and increase their future employability

Examples of Employers Providing Work Experience:

Headstart Program, Bi-County Community Action Programs, ISD #820 Sebeka Schools, Ecumen, ReStore-Habitat for Humanity, Bethesda Nursing Home, Rochester WorkForce Center, Children's Dental Services, TJ Maxx/Home Goods, Wilder Foundation, Cerenity Senior Care, National Sports Center, Polk County Humane Society, MN Department of Transportation, Goodwill Industries, Boys and Girls Club, Subway, Main Street Galleria, Family Pathways Food Shelf, Mercy Hospital, YMCA, Arc's Value Village, Southern MN Regional Legal Services

Success Stories:

Kyra – Minnesota Valley Action Council (MVAC)

Kyra is a 16 year-old junior in high school. She lives with her elderly grandparents in a small town and receives cash assistance through a child-only MFIP grant. The small, rural location of her home town made it difficult for Kyra to secure a job on her own. After being referred to the Youth Career Development Program through the Blue Earth Area Mentors, MVAC helped Kyra secure a work experience in the office of the Blue Earth Area Mentors. She went above and beyond the expectations of the work experience and made a lasting impact on the organization by creating a mentee handbook, assisting at board of directors meetings, and engaging with potential mentors and mentees at a variety of community events. Kyra is now diligently working on crafting a resume that will portray her clerical, organizational, and engagement skills.

Jackie – Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services (CMJTS)

Jackie entered the TANF Innovation program in July, 2014. She had recently started a paid work experience through another youth program at the Rice Care Center in Willmar. This was going well for her and had ignited a new interest to pursue certification as a nursing assistant. Unfortunately, Jackie wasn't sure that this was a viable option for her, as her life was already extremely busy juggling school, home life with her child, and a new work experience. However, after several months, she was determined to complete the nursing assistant training which was available to her through the TANF Innovation funding. With support and encouragement from her employment specialist and others in her life, she completed the training. She was offered a nursing assistant position at her current work experience site and started in her new position on December 15, 2014. The TANF grant also enabled her employment specialist to purchase scrubs so that she could begin in her new role. Jackie's next step is to complete a driver's training course and obtain her driver's license so that she can continue to become more self-sufficient.

Emily – CMJTS

When Emily entered the TANF Innovation project, she had already begun taking a nursing assistant course through the CMJTS Public Assistance Program's Real Deal grant offering. However, she needed some assistance with paying for the scrubs required for her clinical training. The TANF Innovation project was able to provide the funding necessary to assist her with this expense. Emily successfully completed her nursing assistant course and is now better able to support her small family as a certified and employed nursing assistant. Emily was also granted a used car through the Heartland Community Action Agency. While this allowed her to reliably get to work and school, it also added additional expenses to her already tight budget. The TANF Innovation project provided funding for additional uniforms and gas assistance so that Emily could continue to get to work. Emily will graduate from high school this spring and plans to continue to work full-time. She is also planning to continue down the healthcare career pathway, and intends to apply for admission to a nursing program.

Kenisha – Minneapolis Employment and Training (HIRED)

Kenisha, a 21 year-old single mom with a two year-old son, graduated from high school in the spring of 2014. She was referred to HIRED's ProjectCARE program, a summer customer service training for young mothers seeking jobs in customer service and sales occupations. Kenisha passed the customer service exam and received a credential from the National Retail Federation. The instructor, impressed with her excellent performance and the positive changes in her level of engagement and overall attitude, recommended her for a paid internship as a program assistant in the second summer session. Kenisha thrived in her internship and served as a mentor to the other young mothers in the class. She successfully completed the internship and is currently enrolled at Normandale Community College with a career goal of working in social services with youth.

Michael – Rural Minnesota CEP, Inc. (RMCEP)

Michael enrolled in Rural Minnesota CEP, Inc.'s programs in October 2014. He and his wife had recently become homeless and the family was split between two residences. Michael strongly expressed his desire to find permanent employment and create the income his family needed to afford their own apartment. He was working in day labor jobs which did not provide enough income or reliable hours. Michael and his employment counselor discussed work training during the development of his first employment plan as a way

for him to achieve more income and to meet the required hours for MFIP participation. Michael began a work training experience at the Dakota Boys Ranch on Oct. 23, 2014 using funding from the 2014 TANF Innovation project. His motivation and work ethic were immediately apparent to Kim, the store manager and his supervisor. Kim stated that Michael was a hard worker from day one and appreciated his willingness to help with whatever task he was asked to complete. His dedication and desire to work hard earned him a job offer of permanent employment at the Dakota Boys Ranch at \$9.00 per hour for 28 hours per week. He began his direct employment with them on Dec. 21, 2014. Michael is a top candidate for a full time position when one becomes available. Having permanent employment has given Michael renewed hope and motivation to continue working hard to support his family with the goal of self-sufficiency.

Ciera – Tree Trust (Hennepin County)

Ciera has learned a lot of different skills through working in her job with Tree Trust. “I developed some good work habits and an understanding of what it is like to really work hard.” Ciera added she also developed the mindset of a role model with skill, determination, and a desire to succeed. Ciera, 20, enrolled in the Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) in September 2014 after previously working on Tree Trust’s Fresh Start crew in June 2013, when she was 5 months pregnant. After two months with Fresh Start, she left the program but had already learned quickly the importance of being a dedicated worker. “It’s become very important to me to take every opportunity to learn as much as I can and not let one thing pass me by.” After ten months of being unemployed, Ciera returned to Tree Trust with the YACC. “I really wanted the opportunity to finish what I started.” Since September, Ciera has received OSHA 10 and Tree Care Industry certifications and is currently working on getting her driver’s permit. “I am fortunate to work with a team of highly educated, trained and motivated people from Tree Trust. They have all made my life fuller with their compassion and have shown me examples of what kindness and hard work really is.” In October, Ciera was the featured speaker at the agency’s annual fundraising breakfast where she spoke of how much Tree Trust has made a difference in her life. This December, Ciera’s hard work and dedication to the YACC entry crew earned a position on YACC’s advanced crew for the winter and she is looking to her future after YACC. “I’d like to use what I’ve learned here to go to college so I can make a better future for my son and myself.” For now, Ciera is proud to work at Tree Trust and has accomplished some of her personal goals. “I am proud of myself for what I am doing now, for getting myself back on track and for finishing what I started. And at the end of the day, I know that will make all the difference for my future.”

Michelle – Workforce Development, Inc. (WDI)

Michelle is a single mother of two children, ages 5 and 2, and a participant of the Minnesota Family Investment Program. Her youngest child has a health condition that consumes a great deal of her time. The majority of Michele’s work history was in hospitality employment, but she had an interest in WDI’s Healthcare Academy and the Certified Nursing Assistant program and great passion for a career in the health care field. She completed the WDI Healthcare Academy in June 2014, prior to her enrollment in the TANF Innovation project. During the Certified Nursing Assistant training she experienced several obstacles, including medical emergencies of her son and herself, which prevented her from completing the course. However, she made up the class time that she had missed and took the CNA exam. She passed the written section of the exam but not the skills section. Through the TANF Innovation project, she was able to do a work experience at a local nursing home where she could work as a personal care assistant until she was ready to retake the CNA skills exam. This gave her time to work on skill development and on December 9, 2014 she passed the skills exam and became a Certified Nursing Assistant. Her hourly wage increased by \$2.38. When she comes into the office you can witness the growth in her self-confidence. She wears a beaming smile.

Mary* - WDI

“Mary” was 22 years old with a 2 year-old child. She did not have much work experience and had neither completed high school nor started on her GED. This seemed to limit the employment opportunities and fields of work available to her and she was struggling with maintaining even part-time employment. She completed Work Readiness Training and an Interest Inventory, then interviewed and accepted a work experience placement at the local food shelf. Originally placed in the warehouse, staff soon recognized her intelligence and excellent soft skills. The food shelf volunteer coordinator then reassigned her to the position of front desk staff (collecting data, customer service and general assistance). “Mary” has grown exponentially in not only her work readiness skills, but also in her confidence and determination to get her GED and pursue post-secondary education. Since the start of her work experience she has passed 2 of the GED tests and will complete her GED by the summer. Upon completion, she is ready to enroll in post-secondary education, ideally majoring in the Administrative Assistant program. Lastly and just as important, she has found a mentor at the food shelf that she can use as a work and personal reference for future endeavors to come!

Bridget* – Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council (SWMNPIC)

“Bridget” is a single mother with a three year old daughter. She dropped out of school during 10th grade, and obtained her GED at a much later date. She was nervous to attend college as she hadn’t been in the school scene for about 7 years. Bridget is currently

attending MN West in Luverne where she is pursuing her Nursing Degree, and has maintained a 3.0 GPA. The project has helped her with books, supplies, and tuition assistance.

Jenna* - SWMNPIC

"Jenna" is a single mother in high-school, whose long-term goal is to become a preschool teacher. She really wanted to work at a daycare, and was able to do so through the TANF Innovation project. They love her at the daycare, and she is an exceptional employee. She was hired onto their payroll as of January 19th, 2015. Jenna maintains a 3.0 GPA in school, and complies with her requirements. She is thankful for the opportunity given to her and her son through the help she received.

C.S. – Ramsey County Workforce Solutions (HIRED)

C.S. is a 21 year-old single mom with one child, age one. She has limited work experience and some significant mental health issues. Although she had worked in the past, her mental health had made it difficult for her to retain any of her positions. C.S. recognized that she needed to seek help for her mental health, and began seeing a therapist and an Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services (ARMHS) worker. Despite her struggles, she always remained very positive and friendly, and has the reputation of being a very hard worker. She successfully completed the work experience orientation and workshop and was placed at Serenity Senior Care as a Therapeutic Recreation Assistant. She made such a significant impression on her work site supervisor that when they learned she was planning on pursuing Nursing Assistant training, the company offered to pay for her training up front. In addition, they have a position waiting for her once her training is complete and she passes her certification exam. C.S. began her training on January 5, 2015 and is thrilled about this opportunity.

*These names are fictitious to preserve the anonymity of the participants.