

# 2019 TANF Innovation Project Report

The TANF Innovation Project is a partnership between the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), and the Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards (MAWB). The project offers structured work experiences and related services to the following youth receiving Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) benefits:

- **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.**

In addition to **work experience**, the project incorporates **labor market information**, measurement of **work readiness skill development**, introduction to **career pathways**, **financial literacy training**, **preparation for post-secondary education**, and **culturally responsive programming**. Participants work with a youth counselor to develop a plan for **services based on individual need**. The plans include short-term and longer-term goals and incorporate career counseling and case management services for the participant to obtain and maintain employment and develop a career plan.

## Work Experience

This project provides many participants with their first opportunity for work experience, a planned and structured learning experience in a workplace for a limited time. Typically the work experiences are **paid employment opportunities** during the summer and/or school year, but they may also include unpaid **internships**, **job shadowing**, **on-the-job training** and/or **pre-apprenticeship** activities. Work experiences provide opportunities for career exploration and skill development, and are targeted as much as possible to the **specific career interests** of the participant. Examples of employers providing work experiences in 2019 can be found below. Several youth have subsequently been hired by the employers who hosted their work experience.

## Labor Market Information

Youth counselors have been trained in using **labor market tools** and also access the expertise of DEED's **regional labor market analysts** as they work with the youth to develop the individual plan. Participants learn about the opportunities available in **high-growth, in-demand occupations** through field trips to local businesses and tools such as **MN Careers**, **Minnesota Works.net**, and **CareerWISE**.

Funding amount:	<b>\$253,253</b>
TANF innovation funds from the Department of Human Services.	
Average cost per participant:	<b>\$1,667 per youth</b>
Number served:	<b>151</b>
Gender:	<b>68% female; 32% male</b>
Youth from communities of color:	<b>68%</b>
Youth with a disability:	<b>18%</b>
Teen parent:	<b>40%</b>
Younger youth in MFIP household:	<b>60%</b>
Youth attaining work readiness skills:	<b>81%</b>
Youth earning academic or service-learning credit:	<b>24%</b>

## **Work Readiness Skill Development**

Work readiness training provides an introduction to the **expectations and responsibilities** of having a job. Work readiness skill development occurs **before and during placement** in a work experience. Many project sites use a curriculum to teach basic work readiness skills in a workshop setting before the participant begins the work experience. Common topics of this training include: identifying transferrable and employability skills; effective time management; goal-setting strategies; communication skills including listening, non-verbal communication, communicating with supervisors and co-workers, appropriate worksite language and language etiquette; job search techniques, how to complete a job application, prepare a resume and cover letter; interviewing skills; employment laws and employment forms; interpreting a paycheck; keeping a job, problem solving and conflict resolution. Work readiness skills are **evaluated by worksite supervisors** at multiple points during the work experience and participants receive **feedback on strengths and areas for improvement**.

## **Introduction to Career Pathways**

In addition to general career exploration, youth are introduced to the idea of career pathways and career laddering opportunities. Several of the sites have career pathway programs in industries such as **construction, health care, manufacturing, information technology, human services, office and administrative technology, call center and 911 Telecommunications**. Career Pathways programs provide a pathway in high-growth, in-demand occupations where individuals can enhance basic academic skills, participate in job training and earn industry-recognized credentials and post-secondary education credits. TANF Innovation Project participants can enter these programs or create their own pathway in an area of individual interest with the help of their youth counselor. The work experience also is used as a tool to educate participants about career pathways associated with the position or industry in which the young person is working.

## **Financial Literacy Training**

A variety of **financial literacy tools and strategies** help each youth learn skills necessary for long-term financial stability. Counselors assist youth in **opening a bank account** for direct deposit of their paychecks and the development of a personal relationship with a local financial institution. In many cases, this is the first time anyone in the family has ever opened a bank account. Curricula such as the **FDIC's Money Smart for Young Adults** and the **University of Minnesota Extension's Dollars into Sense** introduce key personal finance concepts such as saving, budgeting, and the importance of credit, investments and loans. In some cases, youth use earnings from the program to contribute to the family household budget.

## **Preparation for Post-Secondary Education**

Counselors work with participants in a variety of ways to prepare them to pursue and succeed in post-secondary education as part of their career plan. Activities may include: **tours of training institutions**; assistance with **college applications and fees** ; help with registration for **Accuplacer exams**; connections to **services at the training institutions** (such as TRIO, Student Services, Academic Center, Bookstore,

etc.); assistance with **completion of financial aid forms and identification of scholarships, grants and student loans**; assistance with **course registration**; and **ongoing support** throughout each school term.

### **Culturally Responsive Programming**

Local sites work with partners and worksites to provide services responsive to various needs and cultural backgrounds. Youth are placed at quality worksites that fit their interest and can **accommodate their cultural beliefs**. In addition, employers are informed of any necessary accommodations to the worksite. For example, there are many cultures that prohibit people from touching pork. In such a case, the youth

#### **Examples of Employers Providing Work Experience:**

Mercy Hospital, Bunker Beach Water Park, Cookie Cart, Hennepin Healthcare, Boys and Girls Club, Marshall Alignment, Pierz Library, YMCA, MN Science Museum, St. Paul College, Sanneh Foundation, Doggy Depot, Alexandria Senior Center, New York Mills School, Agape Child Development Center, MN Trades Academy, Asian Media Access, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Children’s Dental Clinic

counselor may avoid a worksite that involves contact with pork, work with the employer to assign duties that don’t involve contact with pork, or develop other worksite accommodations for the participant. In all services, **interpreters** are utilized when requested. Some sites have worksite **supervisors who speak other languages**. The supervisors are encouraged to use English when possible to practice the language in a work setting, but are able to communicate important safety or workplace policies or

procedures in their native language to avoid misunderstandings and ensure a successful work experience. The work experiences can also provide an opportunity for participants to **share their cultural heritage with others**, such as one participant who was able to share her Hispanic heritage with the children at her worksite at a local daycare.

### **Success Stories**

In Fall of 2019, a participant from the City of Minneapolis project was invited to present her experiences and successes as part of a panel presentation at the 2019 Office of Family Assistance (OFA) TANF Summit in Washington, D.C. Additional stories of success from the 2019 project include:

#### **Alberto - Rural MN CEP, Inc.**

Alberto is a 16-year-old from Moorhead. Alberto is part of a Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) family that includes his mother and five other family members. When Alberto came to Rural MN CEP, he was experiencing issues with peers/bullying at school which led to disorderly conduct charges as well as being homeschooled and attending online school. The issues with his peers led to ongoing concerns about Alberto’s safety when going to work. After weighing different work training options with Alberto and his mother, he was placed at Doggy Depot – a worksite that was close enough for Alberto and his mother to feel comfortable with him biking or taking the bus to work. While at his work training site, Alberto’s supervisors and co-workers stated that Alberto was doing a great job! Alberto stated that he really enjoyed working at Doggy Depot and took some pride in the great job that he was doing at the work training site. At the end of the summer, Alberto was hired on directly at his worksite.

### **Maddy – Central MN Jobs and Training Services (CMJTS)**

Maddy is a single mom to two children, living in Milaca. She enrolled in the CMJTS youth program with a handful of career ideas but no clear direction for her life. She started with a career assessment after her enrollment and quickly got answers. She applied and was accepted into Anoka Ramsey Community College to pursue an Associate of Science Degree. With the assistance of her CMJTS employment specialist, she found a job at Mille Lacs Health System in November 2019. She completed a CNA class at Mille Lacs Health System as part of her new job and passed the state test on December 20. She is now one step closer in the direction she would like to go for a career in the health field. Since starting work in a health care setting, she has found an interest in becoming a physical therapy assistant, and her youth employment specialist is there to help her be successful with that plan.

### **Brooke – Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council (PIC)**

Brooke is an out of school, teen parent to her infant son. Brooke obtained her High School Diploma through Minnesota River Valley Education District's Independent Study Credit Recovery program. Brooke was referred to the PIC TANF Youth Program by her PIC Employment Specialist managing her MFIP case. Brooke shared that she was interested in becoming a Nurse and taking some healthcare classes. In addition, it was a necessity to begin working right away. Brooke's Youth Employment Specialist worked with Brooke to get her enrolled in a Certified Nursing Assistant course. Within a matter of a few months, Brooke successfully completed and obtained her Nursing Assistant license. In no less than a few days, Brooke was hired at a long-term care facility working full time making \$13.45 an hour. She is really enjoying her work, and is eager to begin advancing her education to ultimately become an LPN. She will continue working with PIC to progress along her career pathway. Brooke is eager to get registered for classes at MN West in Granite Falls to be considered as a student in their Nursing Program.

### **Ilhan - Minnesota Valley Action Council (MVAC)**

Shortly after meeting Ilhan, MVAC staff learned that she had a passion to work with young children and help provide for her family. Most fifteen-year-olds are looking to save up for their driver's permit or license, but this young lady just wanted to help her mother and siblings get started in the Mankato community. Ilhan earned a work experience with a child care facility near her home and worked with MVAC staff to troubleshoot transportation needs. Ilhan picked up as many hours as possible at the work experience and even walked to work on days when the transportation options did not meet her needs. Ilhan finished her work experience and shared with staff a feeling of pride in helping her family and was surprised about getting academic credit at school for her work hours too.

### **Bella – Workforce Development, Inc. (WDI)**

Bella was first enrolled in Workforce Development Inc. programming in 2018. At the time, she was a student at the Rochester Alternative Learning Center (ALC). With limited employment and career-exploration experience, she was connected to one of the Youth Career Planners. The two of them worked together on career-related activities and searched to find her part-time employment. When this became difficult due to family and school commitments, ALC staff and the Youth Planner collaborated to create a Work Experience for Bella at the school's daycare facility, allowing her to work and attend classes at the same facility during the school day. Upon successful completion of the Work Experience

and her required credits, she graduated from high school in 2019. In 2019, she was enrolled by WDI in the TANF Youth program, and with an interest in cosmetology was able to complete a second Work Experience at the Nova Academy of Cosmetology. Her professionalism and the impression she made through this connection allowed her to apply for school there, where she was accepted and currently attends. The mother of a 1-year old, Bella is enjoying her education and is excited about a career in cosmetology when she graduates.

### **Holly - Minneapolis Employment and Training/MVNA**

Holly enrolled in the Minneapolis Pathways to Success program in January 2018 to obtain her GED and explore career options. In one short month, she passed all practice and official tests and became a graduate! It was apparent early on that Holly had the drive and motivation to set goals for herself, and reach them. After graduation, Holly participated in mock interviews, created a resume, and completed Digital Literacy training modules to better prepare her for the workforce. She earned four Digital Literacy certifications to enhance her computer skills. Soon after finishing her GED, she accepted full time work, and entered the workforce. As a mother of one, she was busy raising her child and working full time. Holly remained independent and successful in the workforce. In fall 2019, Holly inquired about internships. She wanted to explore new opportunities in fields she was interested in, mainly working with children. In October 2019, Holly completed the orientation and onboarding process for internship, and started interning at Four Directions Child and Family Development Center as a part time Teacher Aid. She continued working at her current position at Walmart as well, and balanced her internship, work, and parenting simultaneously. Holly very quickly caught on to the duties and responsibilities of the Four Directions program, and very naturally connected with the children and staff. The site supervisor was very impressed with her skills in communication, attentiveness to detail and working with the children, and her naturally positive energy. She was so impressed that she completed a mid-term evaluation before mid-term, and gave Holly 5/5 (the highest) ratings for all responsibilities in the job, saying that they “loved her” at Four Directions. Upon her mid-term review, Holly stated that she “created bonds with the children and associates”, which rang true in her reviews from staff. She also stated that she would like to learn different languages, and skills to share with the students in class; showing her drive, positive attitude, and willingness to learn new skills and grow as an employee. Holly’s internship lasted a short couple of months, but it was enough time to confirm her positive attitude and skills, and due to her excellent performance as an intern, in December 2019, she was offered an opportunity for full time employment. She accepted! Due to her natural ability, positive attitude, drive, and willingness to learn, Holly will be very successful in any career she pursues.

### **Zoe – Anoka County**

During Summer 2019, Zoe started a work experience at Midwest Disability. She continues to work after high school a few days a week. Zoe helps with many clerical duties around the office, including filing, scanning, front desk assistance, directing calls, and using general office equipment. Zoe states that she has gained lots of skills working at Midwest. These skills include multitasking, answering phones, working independently, and communicating with clients. She knows these skills will help her in future jobs. She is also interested in shadowing Midwest’s paralegal team and learning more about potential career options. Zoe’s site supervisor, Heather, has this to say about her: “Zoe has been a wonderful asset to our company. She learns quickly, responds well to any and all training, and has a very positive

attitude. As a company we could not ask for a better internship experience!” For clients like Zoe, it’s very beneficial to have a work experience in a professional setting like Midwest Disability so she can examine future career options. She now knows that she enjoys working in an office setting and is gaining amazing job references.

### **Faisal - Ramsey County/Workforce Solutions**

Faisal was referred to TANF youth program the summer of 2019. He was a sophomore in high school enrolled at STEP Academy, immigrant, with no prior work experience but with a passion for learning business and providing customer service. Faisal was already a great student in the classroom and was able to show off his great work ethic at Cookie Cart in St. Paul, where he completed his work experience. Faisal completed Leadership, Financial Literacy, Entrepreneurship and work readiness trainings which made him a great employee and allowed him to build great workplace fundamentals. Using these valuable skills he learned as a TANF Youth participant, Faisal was quickly offered unsubsidized employment providing customer service. He entered his junior year of high school as a full time PSEO student taking college classes at St. Paul College. After graduation Faisal plans to further his education with a degree in Business or I.T.

### **Mustafe – Career Solutions**

Mustafe shared the following thoughts about his time with CareerONE (TANF Youth project): “I heard about CareerONE from my school... I join CareerONE summer of 2018. CareerONE taught me my first year how to have a great team building skills, not being shy, and communication skills. After I finished CareerONE they gave me the opportunity of being a Youth Mentor. My second year of CareerONE I learned leadership skills, and they also gave me the opportunity of having internship at CentralCare. I wanted to advise other youth to check CareerONE and maybe apply, and start your career pathway, and your future here at CareerONE.”

#### **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](mailto:Kay.Tracy@state.mn.us) or  
651.259.7555

**Lynn Douma, Program Coordinator**  
Office of Youth Development  
[Lynn.Douma@state.mn.us](mailto:Lynn.Douma@state.mn.us) or  
651.259.7536

**Updated 6/24/20**