

BEST PRACTICES: REACHING YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

Agency: South Central WorkForce Council / Minnesota Valley Action Council

Service Area: Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, LeSueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca, and Watonwan 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: This program provides career and life skills curriculum to youth who have been or are currently in out-of-home placement (i.e. foster care, group homes) to explore, identify and attain positive educational, career and life goals.

Youth increase their ***independent living skills*** such as obtaining a job, finding an apartment, pursuing an education, opening a savings account, obtaining a driver's license, buying a car or accessing community resources. Youth work with an employment counselor one-on-one to address issues and develop strategies in each of these areas. An emphasis is placed on work readiness skills where youth identify a career goal and gather labor market information supporting their career interest. Youth will need to demonstrate that they know how to complete a job application, resume, cover letter, thank you letter and complete a job interview. Youth will need to maintain successful employment and exhibit positive work habits including punctuality, attendance, positive attitude, appearance, interpersonal relations, and task completion. In addition, youth receive financial fitness training in budgeting and savings.

Youth ***develop and maintain relationships with positive caring adults***. Through this program youth strengthen their support system and connections to positive adult role models including, employment counselors and worksite mentors. Worksite supervisors attend a training session on worksite mentoring and are provided a mentoring handbook with activities guided around career and life skills. The activities engage the youth and worksite mentor in discussions about topics such as how the mentor entered their career and the mentor coaches youth in areas such as how to obtain a driver's license.

Outreach: Minnesota Valley Action Council staff recruit eligible youth through organizations in Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, LeSueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca and Watonwan counties including county human services, probation, school principals and counselors, foster care agencies, foster parents, mental health facilities, psychologist and psychiatrists.

Services Provided:

- 1.) Youth are assessed in areas of education, employment, transportation, housing, health, and legal issues. Youth work with an employment counselor one-on-one to address issues and develop strategies in each of these areas.
- 2.) Youth develop a career plan which will emphasize the importance of staying in school and obtaining their high school diploma, as well as identifying a career goal and the pathway to achieve that career.

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- 3.) Youth receive one-on-one or group instruction on career interest assessments, completion of job applications, resumes, cover letters, thank-you letters, job interviewing skills, and financial fitness.
- 4.) Youth participate in work experience opportunities. Youth contact two employers in their field of interest to request an interview. Upon completion of the interviews, employers rate youth participants on their interviewing skills including eye contact, appearance, enthusiasm and ability to answer questions appropriately. Prior to their placement, youth are required to set up a savings account. By setting up a savings account, youth develop a relationship with a financial institution and it is a tool for teaching banking, budgeting, savings and the “pay yourself first” concept. Youth are then placed in worksites where they will work up to 20 hours per week earning minimum wage for up to 12 weeks.
- 5.) The worksite supervisors serve as mentors to youth and are provided a mentoring training and curriculum designed to engage youth in conversation about their career goals. Worksite mentors reinforce importance of completing school and model life skills and positive work habits. While youth are working at the worksites, employment counselors provide on-site monitoring on a regular basis and ongoing troubleshooting. At the worksite, youth acquire positive work habits, new job skills, customer service skills, teamwork skills and develop relationships with positive, caring adults.
- 6.) Youth participate in a variety of activities throughout the year. Youth attend job seeking and job keeping workshops on career exploration, labor market information including demand occupations, value of post-secondary education, goal setting, connections to community resources, life skills training and financial fitness training. Youth participate in field trips including: tours of local business to gain hands on exposure to potential careers in demand occupations and industries in the area; visits to local colleges and universities to learn about post-secondary options and visits to local WorkForce Centers to ensure that all youth are aware of the services available so they know where to go to connect to education and employment opportunities throughout their lifetime. Youth participate in the Tour of Manufacturing event held each October during Minnesota Manufacturers Week. The event is similar to the “parade of homes” concept where local manufacturers open their doors to the public on a Saturday to provide information about their business and career opportunities at their company.
- 7.) We realize that foster care youth also have specialized needs. Youth in foster care have been separated from their families and often feel alone, isolated, and have low self-worth. They often have difficulty forming healthy relationships. Youth participate in group activities with other youth in foster care focused on identifying their support system. Youth need to believe in themselves, learn how to see a bigger and better future and know that they are not alone.

- 8.) Youth who graduate from high school receive assistance with their transition to post-secondary training, military, apprenticeships or obtaining full-time employment.

Impact:

Many youth experiencing familial, academic, and criminal justice problems resulting in out-of-home placement do not have the family support they need to develop positive life and career goals. These services provide youth with the support and skills they need to develop positive educational, career and life goals. We will provide career and life skills curriculum that will connect them to a range of community partners and resources. Youth will assess their interests, aptitudes, and values; explore careers; develop a career plan and gain positive work habits and life skills they need to become successful adults. Youth also strengthen their support system and connections to positive adult role models including, employment counselors and worksite mentors.

Identification of Partners and Leveraged Resources:

In addition to the resources provided by the Workforce Investment Act and the Minnesota Youth Program, the South Central WorkForce Council received a Youth Intervention Program grant from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Justice to serve youth ages 16-21, who have been or are currently in out-of-home placement (i.e. foster care, group homes). Youth that are currently in out-of-home placement receive financial support from the county responsible for the placement. MVAC coordinates with county staff to ensure that the needs of the youth are met.

Partners:

- Foster Parents
- Foster Care Agencies
- Group Homes
- County Human Services
- Probation
- School Districts
- Mental Health Facilities

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