

Executive Summary

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) was awarded a Round Seven Youth Disability Employment Initiative in September 2016 from the U. S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). The Round Seven "Partners for Youth Career Pathways" project focused on youth (ages 14-24) with visible and non-visible disabilities, including those with chronic health conditions. Three rural Local Workforce Development Areas were selected as implementation sites. The three Workforce Development Areas (WDAs) selected for this project were Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Programs (RMCEP), Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council (SWPIC), and Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services (CMJTS). To aid in the administration of the Partners for Youth Career Pathways project, Minnesota partnered with the PACER Center, a national Parent Center serving youth with disabilities and their families.

The overall purpose of Minnesota's Partners for Youth Career Pathways project was to improve education and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities by increasing their participation in career pathways programming. The DEI grant was intended to enhance the State's public workforce capacity to serve youth with disabilities using a job-driven approach and provide local and regional businesses with qualified new workers. These efforts demonstrate the ways in which the implementation sites are meeting the spirit of Section 188 of WIOA.

Minnesota's Partners for Youth Career Pathways project also placed an emphasis on serving youth of color who have a disability. Minnesota has one of the largest racial disparity in employment rates in the country. Minnesota is experiencing a shift in racial demographics that reflects a growing population of people of color especially youth. The Round Seven DEI project was one way in which Minnesota intentionally addressed racial inequities and disability inequality.

Through Minnesota's partnership with the PACER Center, the Partners for Youth Career Pathways project engaged parents and families by helping them understand workforce and educational resources that are available to support their young person explore the world of work. Research indicates that parent involvement has been shown to be a predictor of employment success for youth with disabilities. Thus, Minnesota found it important to leverage the powerful resources and expertise of staff at the PACER Center.

Minnesota identified **five** objectives for the Partners for Youth Career Pathways grant:

1. Strengthen partnerships and strategically align youth and adult career pathways systems to effectively serve youth with disabilities through multiple entry and exit points.
2. Build capacity of WDA staff to support at least 300 youth with disabilities to participate in career pathways system using the Guidepost for Success best practice framework and an Integrated Resource Team (IRT) approach.
3. Utilize innovative intergenerational approach to support successful outcomes for youth with disabilities participating in career pathways process system and programs.

4. Implement specific strategies to address the state's employment gap for culturally and racially diverse individuals.
5. Increase the state's number of employment networks (ENs) and the number of Social Security Disability beneficiaries participating in career pathways programs.

Ultimately, through multi-agency partnerships spanning the state and local levels, Minnesota's Partners for Youth Career Pathways has successfully supported over 400 youth with disabilities in achieving their education and employment goals through an intergenerational, person-centered approach.

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Goals and Accomplishments

A coordinated effort on behalf of all of Minnesota's Round Seven DEI partners contributed to Minnesota exceeding all five of the objectives outlined in the technical proposal.

The three implementation sites co-enrolled DEI participants in WIOA Youth or WIOA Adult programs as appropriate. The implementation sites have also strengthened partnerships with local Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and increased co-enrollments, especially for individuals with significant barriers to employment. Partnerships with County Social Services staff have also increased through the implementation of the Round 7 Youth DEI grant. These partnerships facilitate referrals that help county social service staff and WDA staff meet the needs of youth with disabilities. **(objective 1)**

The implementation sites have also been able to increase their capacity to serve at least 300 youth with disabilities participating in career pathways programs. The youth are supported through Guideposts for Success-based programming as well as the use of Integrated Resource Teams (IRTs). As of March 31st, 2020, the three implementation sites served a total of 444 youth with disabilities. It is important to note that many of the youth that were served under this project also face additional barriers to employment and education. Moreover, many youth come from families receiving public assistance, are the first in their family to pursue post-secondary education, and . Minnesota exceeded its goal of serving at least 300 youth under the DEI project. **(objective 2)**

The implementation sites utilize an intergenerational approach when supporting youth with disabilities through DEI programming. The PACER Center is an integral part of Minnesota's efforts to leverage parental and familial involvement in supporting youth with disabilities achieve their education and employment goals. Parent and family workshops provide resources to families who can make better informed decisions when working with their young person. Parents and families are also involved with Integrated Resource Team (IRT) meetings and support their youth when making critical decisions about their educational and career opportunities. The intergenerational approach also informs parents and families about employment services available to them through Minnesota's American Job Centers. **(objective 3).**

Minnesotans of color, especially those with a disability face a drastic disparity in employment rates. All three implementation sites have made it a priority to serve youth of color with disabilities through the DEI grant. This work is also supported by the PACER Center's multicultural advocates who are helpful in providing guidance to employment counselors on how best to engage with communities of color. The advocates also help facilitate cultural misunderstandings as it relates to Minnesota's education system. The Partners for Youth Career Pathways project and other state and federal resources provided just over \$1,000,000 in wages and fringe directly to youth participants. Providing youth with disabilities, especially youth of color who have a disability, with paid work experiences enhances their ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Enhancing youth of color and youth with disabilities ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency is in alignment with [Minnesota's WIOA State Plan](#) and [Olmstead Plan](#) **(objective 4).**

Minnesota has identified increasing the number of Employment Networks (ENs) as a priority under the DEI grant. In addition, the implementation sites increased the number of Social Security Disability Beneficiaries participating in career pathways programming. CMJTS has been an established Employment

Network since 2013 and SWPIC and Rural CEP both started as Employment Networks as members of the American Dream Employment Network in January 2018 (**objective 5**).

Activities, deliverables, and outcomes related to each of Minnesota's five objectives are outlined in greater detail throughout this report.

Objective One: Aligning Youth and Adult Career Pathways

Blending and Braiding Resources

From the beginning of the grant, the implementation sites immediately identified ways in which youth and adult career pathways could be leveraged to best support youth with disabilities. Minnesota's Partners for Youth Career Pathways project incorporated the [six key elements of career pathways](#) into the overarching work plan as well as the implementation site work plans. The first key element is cross-agency partnerships which is tied to Minnesota's strategies to align youth and adult career pathways.

One core element of cross-agency partnerships is the blending and braiding of funds at the local level. The implementation sites are recipients of Title I WIOA Youth and WIOA Adult funds. These funds were leveraged to support youth as they transition into the adult labor force. During the 42-month demonstration project, the implementation sites served 444 youth. Of the youth served, 189 (43%) were co-enrolled in either the WIOA Youth or WIOA Adult local program. Youth who were co-enrolled in WIOA programs gained broader access to education and employment resources to facilitate success in the adult labor force. At the local level, braiding of WIOA Youth/Adult funds provide the implementation sites the flexibility to offer paid work-based learning experiences, necessary support services, and educational supports.

Minnesota's implementation sites leveraged state-funded youth employment programming to support the youth served under the Partners for Youth Career Pathways project. In Minnesota, the three WDAs receive Minnesota Youth Program (MYP) funding. The funding provides WDAs with the flexibility to reach into the school systems and begin working with youth while they are in high school. The funding also encourages WDAs to serve out-of-school youth. The Minnesota Youth Program is often used as a stepping stool prior to enrolling the youth into the WIOA Youth program. Minnesota's implementation sites to leveraged MYP funding for 313 (70%) of DEI participants.

Each local area has unique funding opportunities that allowed for additional co-enrollments. Two of the implementation sites, SWPIC and CMJTS were grant recipients of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) funding from Minnesota's Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS). The Pre-ETS funding has allowed the two implementation sites to formalize and expand partnerships with local secondary schools. The Pre-ETS funding helped facilitate referral opportunities to ensure youth are able to access critical education and employment resources.

Success Story – RMCEP

Joanne enrolled in RMCEP's WIOA Youth program as an OSY and co-enrolled in the DEI project. Prior to her involvement with RMCEP's programs, Joanne was receiving Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) and TANF supports. She was enrolled in MFIP because she was pregnant and about to have her baby in addition to living in a treatment facility. She worked with the YouthBuild program to earn her high school diploma as well as job skills and life skills. She excelled in the program and they offered her an internship in their Leadership Program. This is a difficult role to earn, but they were very impressed at her hard work and leadership. It came with added responsibilities, and she excelled in her new role. During Joanne's enrollment and



employment, RMCEP was able to offer her support services as needed to maintain her job. She was also able to obtain her driver's license during her enrollment. Upon completion of Joanne's enrollment in YouthBuild she has earned her high school diploma she plans to attend Leech Lake Tribal College for a degree in Business.

Local Partnerships

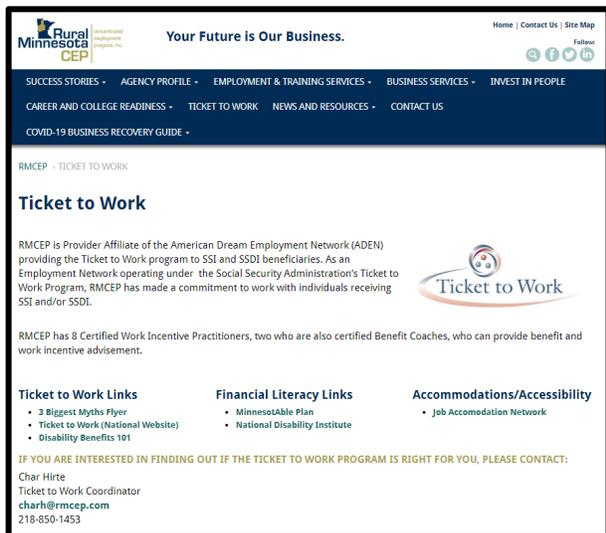
All three implementation sites were able to leverage resources through local community colleges to support DEI participants. Resources offered through local community colleges include the Pell grant, educational supports (Upward Bound, TRiO, tutoring), disability services offices, and instructors. Pell grants are leveraged to support youth as they pursue certificate and degree programs. Leveraging the resources of the disability services offices at local community colleges is important because it provides an opportunity for youth to gain important self-advocacy skills. One of the difficulties that youth with disabilities face when transitioning from a secondary to a post-secondary setting is that the young person must seek out supports for their disability at the post-secondary level. In a secondary setting, disability services are required by law to be provided to students (e.g. Individual Education Plan, or 504 Plan). Advocating for educational supports is the responsibility of the individual at the post-secondary level because laws do not require disability services to be provided in the same way as law requires in a secondary setting. While the onus is on the individual to articulate the educational supports they need, WDA staff support the youth by using an Integrated Resource Team approach. To help facilitate a coordinated effort, staff at CMJTS noted that at the post-secondary level, IRTs were important in helping youth successfully transition from a secondary to a post-secondary setting. The IRTs were able to bring instructors, disability service staff, the DRC, and the youth participant together to help ensure that the youth would be set up for success in the post-secondary environment.

Alignment of youth and adult career pathways occurs most commonly when youth are in school and able to access career and technical education (CTE) resources. One way in which SWPIC has leveraged CTE resources (Carl D. Perkins funding)¹ and work-based learning is through the local Career Pathways Partnership (CPP). That partnership brings together the Minnesota River Valley Education District, Minnesota West Technical and Community College campuses, SWPIC, and Adult Basic Education together to provide a menu of holistic services to youth. Many of the youth that participate in programming offered through the CPP received services under the DEI project as well as WIOA Youth, WIOA Adult, and the Minnesota Youth Program. The CPP supports alignment of youth and adult career pathways opportunities because youth learn new skills through short-term certificate programs while also earning a wage by utilizing the skills in a local workplace. One of the most popular programs was an electrical controls short-term certificate. The certificate program was developed by Minnesota West with input from local employers which helps align coursework to the workplace for students while addressing the needs of local employers. Opportunities offered through the CPP provides youth with multiple entry and exit points in local career pathways. Ultimately, successful alignment of youth and adult career pathways must incorporate the needs of local employers.

¹ The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act.
<https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ224/PLAW-115publ224.pdf>

Social Security Disability Beneficiaries and Employment Networks

Another tool that Minnesota's implementation sites leveraged in order to better align youth and adult



career pathways was the use of the Employment Network model. The Ticket to Work program provided youth receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) with the opportunity to explore career pathways opportunities that provides them with the necessary supports to reenter the labor force. The transition to adult pathways for SSI and SSDI youth recipients occurs once the youth turns age 18. At age 18, the Social Security Administration requires a determination of benefits. Assuming the individual is still able to receive SSI and/or SSDI beyond age 18, the participant is able to start exploring work with support of the Ticket to Work Program. Each implementation site promotes the

Ticket to Work on their organizations' websites. The Ticket to Work Program and its impact on the Partners for Youth Career Pathways project will be discussed in greater detail later in this report.

Objective Two: Building WDA Staff Capacity

Throughout the grant period, there were multiple ways in which staff at each of the three implementation sites participated in capacity building activities. Professional development opportunities for the DRCs were made available at quarterly in-person convenings organized by the State Lead. In addition, the PACER Center was critical in providing in-service training opportunities for WDA staff. The DEI grant also provided CMJTS with the opportunity to develop the [“Disability Resource and Information Training Curriculum.”](#)

The Disability Resource and Information Training Curriculum created by CMJTS allowed their organization to provide in-service trainings to all staff on best practices and effective strategies in serving people with disabilities including youth. With the support of a Technical Assistance and Training (TAT) grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, the National Disability Institute (NDI) and Maher and Maher provided additional resources for each module in the curriculum. The curriculum is comprised of five unique modules that include learning objectives, eLearning content, and other resources. The following modules are included in the curriculum:

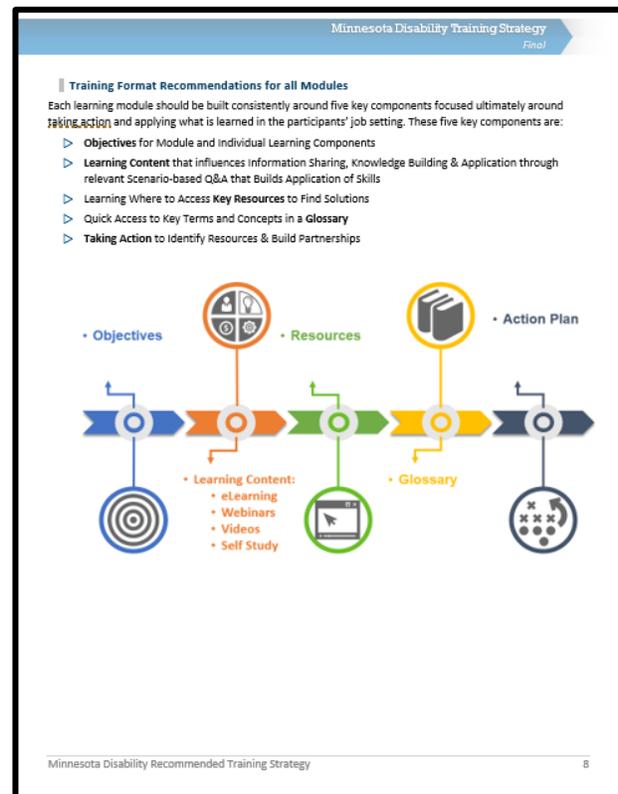
1. **WIOA and Disability** – This module provides staff with information on how WIOA supports individuals with disabilities including Section 188 and disability discrimination.
2. **Building Confidence around Disability** – The second module incorporates strategies for WDA staff to practice comfortability engaging with people across the spectrum of disabilities, describing confidentiality and other legal requirements around disability-related information, and identifying reasonable accommodations and resources to help resolve challenges around disability disclosure.
3. **Accessibility for a Diversity of Customers** – Module three is focused on how physical, programmatic, and communication access are implemented from policy to practice under WIOA Section 188; demonstrating how Section 188 and AJC certification offer the AJCs and partners with the opportunity

to evaluate and improve physical and programmatic access; and identifying assistive technology options for clients.

4. **Partnerships and Collaboration** – This module provides staff with resources to increase partnerships and collaborations to support individuals with disabilities. Strategies include the Integrated Resource Team model, service delivery coordination, and cost sharing to provide the necessary resources to support clients.

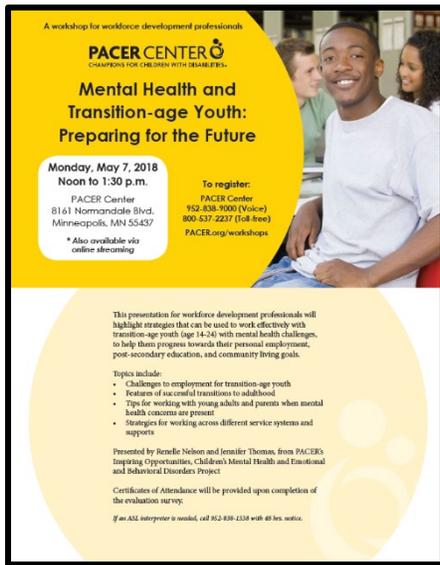
5. **Youth and Disabilities** – The final module relays unique challenges that youth with disabilities face in accessing the workforce system and employment, including a higher drop-out and poverty rate, a lack of disability identification, and higher unemployment rate. This leads to the *Guideposts for Success* and what all youth need in order to make a successful transition from school to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. Guideposts for youth provide the research that identifies educational and career development

interventions to promote employment success of all youth, including youth with disabilities. The elements of Guideposts are integrated throughout this module, with themes of high expectations for all youth; equality of opportunity for everyone; individualization, inclusion, and integration; full participation and informed choice; and competitive integrated employment and economic self-sufficiency, with or without supports.



CMJTS has integrated the Disability Resource and Information Training Curriculum into its onboarding training for new employees. This ensures that newly hired staff have a solid foundation for working with youth and adults with disabilities. CMJTS also partnered with the other two implementation sites to provide in-service trainings to their respective staff members. The curriculum serves as a great resource for peer-to-peer training opportunities. This training is a core component of Minnesota’s strategy for sustaining best practices and effective strategies under the Round 7 DEI grant. The curriculum is posted on DEED’s website and has been shared with other states including Iowa and New York. Building on their experience creating this curriculum, staff at CMJTS were invited to participate in the Disability and eLearning Task Force convened by the USDOLETA and NDI. Members of the [Disability and Employment eLearning Task Force](#), in collaboration with the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), developed eLearning modules to help support the professional development needs of the workforce development staff across nearly 2,400 American Job Centers. The eLearning task force was comprised of 27 members from 20 states across WIOA programs.

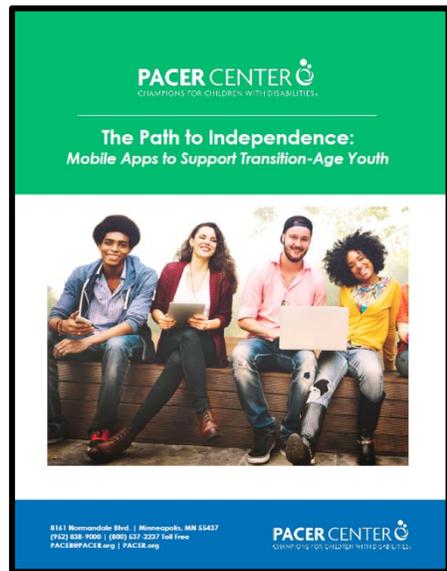
The PACER Center was integral in providing in-service trainings to WDA staff on various topics related to



the transition from youth to adult systems. One such training conducted by PACER Center staff at RMCEP was “Engaging Families of Youth from Diverse Cultures.” This training leveraged the expertise of the PACER Center’s multicultural parent advocates and liaisons and highlighted various cultural sensitivities around disability as well as challenges faced by new American populations in rural settings. PACER also provided other parent and family trainings that were available to WDA staff. One training in particular that received especially high attendance was the session on [Mental Health and Transition-age Youth](#). This presentation for workforce development professionals highlighted strategies that can be used to work effectively with transition-age youth (age 14-24) with mental health challenges in order to help them progress towards their personal employment, post-secondary education, and community living goals. Topics included: Challenges to employment for transition-age youth;

Features of successful transitions to adulthood; Tips for working with young adults and parents when mental health concerns are present; and Strategies for working across different service systems and supports.

Additional in-service trainings that PACER provided include topics on assistive technology, the *Guideposts for Success*, PACER Resources, and ABLE Accounts. These topics were chosen because they align with the spirit of WIOA and more specifically, Section 188 of WIOA. One of the trainings called “[Assistive Technology in Adult Settings: Postsecondary, Employment, and Community](#)” was provided by PACER’s [Simon Technology Center](#). This training provided attendees with information on how assistive technology can be leveraged to support success in adult settings. This is important because once youth transition from a secondary to postsecondary setting, the burden is on the youth to seek out strategies for success. Recognizing the importance of assistive technology, the PACER Center developed [The Path to Independence: Mobile Apps to Support Transition-age Youth](#). Many of the mobile apps are free but some come at a cost. The Simon Technology Center at PACER has a lending library for mobile apps so that individuals can try it out before purchasing. Building staff capacity around affordable and available assistive technology options for youth is important in supporting youth as they transition from secondary to postsecondary settings. Six categories of mobile apps are included and constitute:



1. **Exploring College and Career Pathways** – Self-Assessment and Career Exploration, College Search, Financial Aid for College;
2. **Finding and Getting a Job** – Job Search Apps, Creating a Resume, Interviewing, and Volunteering,

3. **Vocational Support** – Apps to support on-the-job success through modeling and reinforcing job tasks and skills;
4. **Independent Living Skills** – Daily Living, Cooking, Transportation, Money Management, Social Skills and Communication, Sleep, Health and Wellness, and Taking Medication;
5. **Executive Function** – To-Do Lists, Timers, Time Management and Healthy Habits, and Visual Schedules; and
6. **Reading, Writing, and Note-taking Supports** – Speech to Text, Screen Reading, and Academic Supports.

The PACER Center, DEED, and the Minnesota Department of Human Services partnered with national experts from the National ABLEResource Center to provide WDA staff, social service providers, and families with information about ABLEResource Accounts. The presentation, “[ABLE to Save – ABLEResource Accounts, a New Savings Opportunity for Individuals with Disabilities](#)” was attended by 154 people from Minnesota and other states. Attendees learned how new ABLEResource Accounts allow families to save up to \$15,000 per year for their child without affecting their eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Medicaid. Subject matter experts from the ABLEResource National Resource Center and the State of Minnesota ABLEResource Plan discussed eligibility requirements, qualified expenses, annual and lifetime savings limits, and the relationship of ABLEResource Accounts to special needs trusts. Providing staff with information about ABLEResource plans is incredibly important because ABLEResource plans allow individuals with disabilities to achieve financial independence by saving their own money for their own needs. By informing clients about ABLEResource plans, clients are better positioned to make decisions that impact their financial wellbeing. Knowledge about ABLEResource Plans is also important to supporting individuals who are participating in the Ticket to Work Program and can help facilitate the transition from SSI and/or SSDI benefits to gainful employment and economic stability and independence.

The State Lead worked with the Executive Director of the Minnesota Foundation for Student Organizations (MNFSO) to provide a poverty awareness training to the DRCs. The MNFSO provides oversight and support to career and technical education (CTE) student organizations such as SkillsUSA, Future Farmers of America (FFA), and Health Occupations Student of America (HOSA). The Executive Director provided the DRCs with a training on Poverty Awareness and strategies to best support individuals who are in the cycle of poverty. The training materials comes from [Communication Across Barriers](#). The training incorporates how individuals from various cultures may seek out and absorb information, poverty competencies for leaders, the meaning of poverty, and strategies to break poverty barriers. The strategies to break poverty barriers portion of the training provided the DRCs with research-based practical strategies to implement in programming.

Strategies to Break Poverty Barriers	
Below are five research-based theories on helping people move out of poverty and the correlating best practices for educating students and connecting with families.	
Theory	Best Practices
<p>1. Strengths Perspective Approach: Every individual has strengths. You can empower students and families by focusing on what is good about them, what they do know and what skills they have now.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for the strengths and skills of students and families. Tell them what you believe is good about them. • Stand in awe of people fighting poverty. • Ask students and families for their help. Find ways they can contribute, feel helpful and be included. • Give students and families opportunities to shine. • Tell people you are happy to see them; make them feel wanted and valued. • Practice showing empathy instead of sympathy (no one likes people to feel sorry for them).
<p>2. Resiliency Theory: People can develop resiliency when they are supported by others who tell them what is good about them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat people special. Show people what is unique about them. This builds resiliency. • Practice seeing strengths using the strategies listed above.
<p>3. Asset Theory: The more assets a student has, both internal (conflict resolution skills, sense of purpose, etc.) and external (adult relationships, caring school climate, etc.), the more likely they will succeed. The Search Institute has identified 40 developmental assets for youth. To download, go to: www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn what assets your students and families have and what services or opportunities they need to move forward. Connect them to resources. • Build partnerships in your community so you know where to find resources. • Help people navigate the middle-class world such as paperwork, asking the right questions, taking steps, etc.
<p>4. Social Capital Theory: People are more likely to succeed when they know the right people and have meaningful connections with those who can help. People in poverty greatly benefit from having trusting relationships with people who have benefited from education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce people to others who have benefited from education. • Tell people about opportunities (programs, events, etc.) that you know will put them in a place to build relationships with people who are educated. • Make connections face-to-face, instead of giving phone numbers or a “list” of people/agencies to call. • Give people address books and your contact info!
<p>5. Faulty Attribution Theory: When we attribute motives to someone else’s behavior without discovering the “why” behind their actions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withhold judgement of behavior. • Tell yourself people are doing the best they can with the information and perspectives they possess. • Remind yourself that your experiences and world-view may be different from those you serve. • Attempt to find out the “why” behind behavior.

In order to build staff capacity around working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired, the State Lead coordinated a one-day training event with Minnesota’s State Services for the Blind (SSB), a

training provider – Blind, Inc., and a tour of a work experience for blind/visually impaired youth at Target Corporation. This training provided the DRCs with information about how they could leverage resources like assistive technology, electronic textbooks, braille conversion, and other audio resources provided SSB and their service partners when serving blind and visually impaired customers.

The PACER Center developed a publication that assists employment counselors with integrating the

Guidepost 1: School-Based Preparatory Experiences

What can CareerForce staff and others do to engage youth in school-based activities that help prepare them to successfully transition to career pathways, postsecondary education, and independent living?

WIOA program elements (See page 15 and Appendix 4) that correspond to school-based preparatory experiences: 1, 2, 4, 5, 12, 13, and 14.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES	SE	CE	CP	PERSON/AGENCY RESPONSIBLE
Communication skill development (reading, writing, speaking, using information and communication technology)			•	School staff, ABE staff, WIOA program staff
Coding, keyboarding and other occupational skills classes			•	
Soft skill development (active listening, time management, teamwork skills, etc.)			•	
Tutoring, study skills training, or school-based mentoring programs such as "Check & Connect"			•	
Basic skills training, including remedial reading or math			•	School District
ESL classes			•	
Alternative school placement, such as career academies			•	ABE
GED instruction			•	
Learning style inventories*	•			Educators, ABE staff, WIOA program staff
Interest inventories*	•			
School-based career exploration activities (field trips, guest speakers, MGIS activities and portfolio, summer career camps)		•		Educators, WIOA program staff
Identify a program of study related to career interests*		•	•	
Practice job interviews		•	•	

SE = Self Exploration activities; CE = Career Exploration activities; CP = Career Planning/Career Pathways activities.
*Minnesota Career Information System (MCIS) https://portal.mnsc.intocareers.org; CAREEbase https://careerinfo.minnstate.edu; O*Net https://www.onetonline.org; and eTAC https://atrac.mnsc.com all offer tools for learning style, interest and career assessments. MDE's Personal Learning Plan Toolkit (2016) provides links to a wealth of additional online resources.

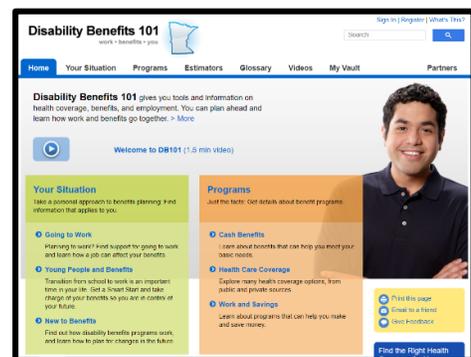
IX. Incorporating the Guideposts for Success into Minnesota's Personal Learning Plan Process

Guidepost for Success into Minnesota's Personal Learning Plans (PLP). This research-based publication, "[Incorporating the Guideposts for Success into Minnesota's Personal Learning Plan Process](#)" is incredibly important for counselors working with in-school youth because Minnesota requires all students, by no later than 9th grade, to have to have a PLP. The PLPs must provide a comprehensive plan to prepare for and complete career and college-ready curriculum. Each PLP must be reviewed and revised annually by the student, the student's parents/guardians, and the school district to ensure the student is making adequate progress in order to graduate on time. The PACER publication includes information on Integrated Resource Teams approach, the 14 WIOA Program elements, and the *Guideposts for Success*. The charts in the resource provide employment counselors with scenarios of how the *Guideposts for Success* can be used to identify gaps in service provision as well as how they align with the 14 WIOA Program elements. The publication also

includes examples of potential activities that youth may participate in. These activities align with each guidepost and are categorized as self-exploration, career exploration, and career pathways/planning activities. In alignment with the *Guideposts for Success* and youth development research, youth who complete activities under all three categories are better prepared to transition from youth pathways to adult pathways in education and employment.

Partnership with Minnesota Department of Human Services

The State Lead met with staff from the Disability Determination Services staff at the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) to learn more about the Benefits Coaches Training opportunity provided through the agency. The training was initially developed for Vocational Rehabilitation and staff from Minnesota's Centers for Independent Living and is a complement to the Certified Work Incentive Coordinator (CWIC) training provided by Virginia Commonwealth University and Cornell University. Unlike the CWIC training, the Benefits Coaches Training provides in-depth information on Minnesota-specific public assistance benefits. The DRCs were the first individuals outside of VRS and independent living staff to be able to participate in the training. The training is an intensive six- to eight-week program that provides participants with information about Minnesota-specific public assistance



benefits as well as training on using [DB101](#) to support individuals receiving disability and other public assistance benefits.

There are five elements of the training that are required to be completed before the certification is achieved. These requirements include:

1. **Benefit Coach Self-Paced Training** – Provides an overview of DB101 and basic information about the benefits and program rules for the benefits covered on DB101.
2. **Knowledge Exam** – This assess the knowledge on the concepts covered in the asynchronous training.
3. **Benefit Coach Live Training** – Delivered virtually, the live training focuses on the skills needed to deliver benefit coach services such as completing a Benefits and Work Estimator session, writing a Benefits Report, explaining the results, and helping a person make a financial decision about work.
4. **Practical Exam** – Candidates are required to demonstrate the benefit coaching skills such as determining the appropriate level of service and scrutinizing benefit verifications.
5. **Job Shadowing** – Candidates job shadow an experienced Benefit Coach for a total of eight hours to build their skills in delivering benefit coaching services.

Success Story - CMJTS

Christina was referred to Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services' Youth Program through Vocational Rehabilitation Services. She was trained in administrative skills. Christina had completed a volunteer position through Vocational Rehabilitation Services however, they were unable to place her into a permanent position. Christina's employment counselor teamed up with Vocational Rehabilitation Services to assist in finding a permanent placement for Christina. After spending some time with Christina, her counselor quickly realized that although her skill level was high for administrative work, her passion was not. Christina was, however, very passionate about working with children. Christina received a placement at Kids Club Child Care through the Big Lake School District for a three-month work experience beginning May 1st, 2017 which paid \$9.50 per hour. When the work experience was over the manager at Kids Club expressed her desire to keep Christina on as they felt she was a perfect fit for the position. Christina's manager said, "Christina is a huge asset to our program; the kids adore her!" Christina was hired on as a Kids Club Instructor at \$14.90 per hour on August 21st, 2017. Christina continues to excel in this position. When her counselor asked Christina how the job was going, she said, "I love it! Everything is going really great."



Objective Three: Intergenerational Approach to Support Youth

Parent and Family Education and Involvement

Understanding career pathways is important for youth, but it is also important for parents and families to be knowledgeable about education and employment opportunities for their young person. The PACER Center was critical in providing resources to families across the State of Minnesota about career pathways opportunities for youth with disabilities. An important deliverable of the Partners for Youth Career Pathways project was the PACER Center's development of a career pathways video for youth and their

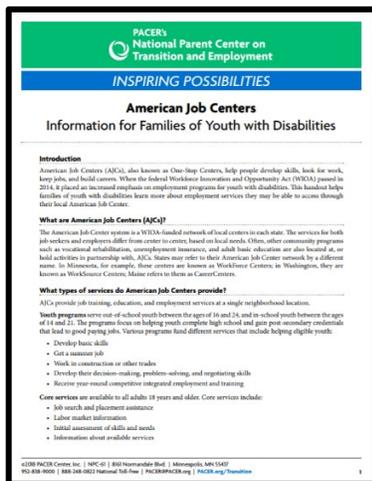


families. The video, [“Connecting Youth to Careers: A Journey to Employment Success”](#) follows Jessica from 9th grade through her senior year as she explores her strengths and interests, gains work experience, and finds her career pathway. It covers self-awareness, career research and career planning activities. It also answers questions about what parents can do to help launch their teen on a successful career path.

The PACER Center also developed the [“Three Steps to a Career Pathway: Tips for Parents”](#) brief as part of the Partners for Youth Career Pathways project. The three steps include self-exploration, career exploration, and career planning. The brief provides parents with succinct information about the three essential components of a career pathway. By understanding career pathways better, parents can be better informed to help their young person transition successfully from youth to adult opportunities. This brief, along with the Connecting Youth to Careers is supported by academic research as well as survey responses from parents and youth who attended various PACER Center Parent and Family workshops. One way in which the DEI project also provided resources and information to parents and families about career pathways opportunities was through Community Transition Interagency Committees (CTIC) partnerships. RMCEP’s partnerships with nine CTICs was a critical way in which families, youth, teachers, and special education professionals learned about career pathways opportunities offered by RMCEP as well as other education and employment resources to support youth transitioning from youth to adult opportunities. The DRC for RMCEP represented the organization at CTIC meetings and frequently provided families and youth with resources developed by the PACER Center.

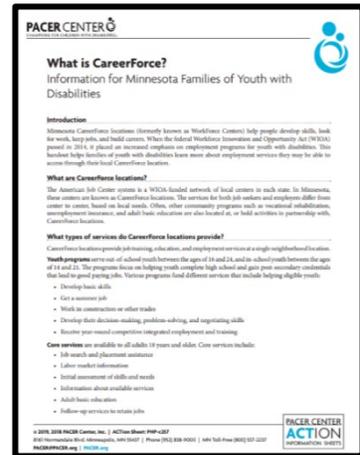


Another important aspect to increase the awareness of parents and families regarding the benefits of employment for their young. One of the resources that is available to job seekers with disabilities is Minnesota’s wide network of American Job Centers (AJC). During the grant period the PACER Center developed two resources that provide parents, families, and youth with disabilities with more information about the resources that are available at AJCs. The publications identify the One Stop model of the AJCs and how individuals can be connected to resources under each title program of WIOA. The first publication completed by the PACER Center, [“American Job Centers: Information for Families of Youth with Disabilities”](#) is focused on the services provided by AJCs more broadly while the second publication uses Minnesota-specific terminology to solidify a common understanding of AJCs. The PACER Center is nationally recognized for its work as a parent and family training center. A primary reason why the decision was made to publish an informational brief on AJCs was that there are parents and families



outside of Minnesota that rely on resources from the PACER Center. Thus, the publication allows for a broader application of information contained in the briefs because it is applicable to other states.

The Minnesota-specific publication, "[What is CareerForce](#)" includes information on how to locate the nearest AJC and the basic WIOA Youth program eligibility requirements. These publications are important in providing parents and families with information about resources available to them in their communities. By providing parents and families with these important resources, parents and families can better assist their young person make informed decisions about future education and career aspirations. The publication directs individuals to Minnesota's newly developed [CareerForceMN.com](#) website for additional education and employment resources for support.



Although the intent of these publications is for families of youth with disabilities, the included information is relevant to the parents/families themselves. Meeting the spirit of the intergenerational approach, parents can equip themselves with information about resources that are available to them should they decide to seek out resume assistance, a new career, or training opportunities for new skills.

Integrated Resource Team Approach

Parents and families are also involved with Integrated Resource Team (IRT) meetings and support their youth when making decisions about education and career opportunities. The *Guideposts for Success*

School-Based Preparatory Experiences: What school-based activities is a youth participating in to help prepare them to transition to employment, postsecondary education, and independent living?		
Potential Activities and Resources	Person/Agency Responsible	Timeline
1.		
2.		
3.		

WIOA Program Elements: 1, 2, 4, 5, 12, 13 & 14
Pre-ETS Activities: Postsecondary Education Counseling

Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning Experiences: What activities are being offered to youth that help them explore careers, identify career goals, and provide meaningful work experiences?		
Potential Activities and Resources	Person/Agency Responsible	Timeline
1.		
2.		
3.		

WIOA Program Elements: 4, 5, 11, 12, 13 & 14
Pre-ETS Activities: Job Exploration Counseling, Work-Based Learning Experiences, Workplace Readiness Training

Youth Development and Leadership: How are youth being helped to direct their own lives, to make informed decisions, and to be connected to caring adults?		
Potential Activities and Resources	Person/Agency Responsible	Timeline
1.		
2.		
3.		

WIOA Program Elements: 4, 5, 6, & 12
Pre-ETS Activities: Work-Based Learning Experiences, Instruction in Self-Advocacy, Pre-ETS Coordination Services

Additional Note:

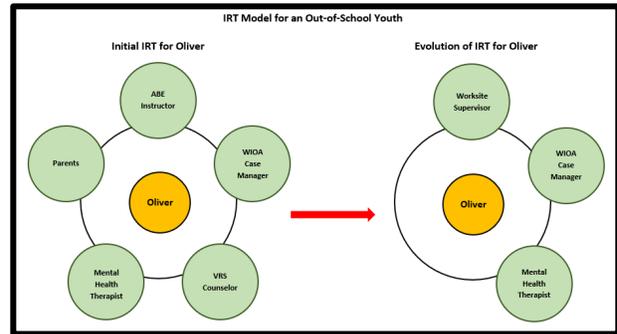
provide guidance to employment counselors, parents, families, and youth about the need for family involvement during the youth's transition to adulthood. Across all three implementation sites 258 or 58% of DEI participants received services through the IRT approach. To better facilitate IRTs, SWPIC expanded on the PACER Center's [Youth Action Plan and Individual Service Strategy](#) document that was created under Minnesota's Round 3 Youth DEI grant. SWPIC integrated multiple components of federal programs to better align services and identify the agencies that are responsible for specific supports for youth. The [Individual Service Strategy and Employment Plan](#) document developed by SWPIC aligns the *Guideposts for Success*, WIOA Program Elements, Pre-ETS activities, and the IRT approach by identifying youth goals and responsible agencies. This

document provides youth, parents/families, employment counselors, and other support personnel with a clear description of roles in order to reduce duplication of services and increase partnerships at the local level to support youth with disabilities in achieving their education and employment goals.

In order to sustain the efforts of the Partners for Youth Career Pathways project, the Project Lead revised Minnesota's WIOA Youth Policy on Career Pathways to provide examples of how Integrated Resource Teams can be structured. For example, Youth who have an IEP from their secondary school, may not need an IRT if the employment counselor and other support personnel attend the meetings because the IRT would be a duplication of efforts. Moreover, the policy describes that youth may need to convene multiple

IRTs while receiving services. Individuals who are supporting the youth at IRTs may change over time as the needs of youth change.

The [WIOA Youth Career Pathways Policy](#) includes various scenarios of what an IRT may look like. These scenarios were based off the examples provided in the [“Incorporating the Guideposts for Success into Minnesota’s Personal Learning Plan”](#) document developed by the PACER Center. Aligning these resources at the local level will help reinforce the best practices developed throughout the Partners for Career Pathways grant as well as facilitate the integration of the best practices into WIOA programming. Key aspects of IRTs are described to ensure WIOA Youth case managers understand that:



1. Integrated Resource Teams are person-centered, youth-driven, and designed to support youth in achieving their education, employment, and personal goals.
2. There is no one way to convene an IRT. Integrated Resource Team membership is dependent on the unique needs and goals of the youth.
3. Integrated Resource Teams for in-school youth *may* be duplicative and unnecessary if the Youth has an IEP team.

Success Story – SWPIC

Trever began meeting with Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council in 2016. He had just turned 17 and was a junior in High School. He met with SWPIC staff on a monthly basis. The mentoring and monthly support Trever received through SWPIC is a part of **Guidepost 3 – Youth Development and Leadership**. He started working with the janitorial staff at the High School in August of 2016 through a work experience sponsored by SWPIC with the help of a Pre-ETS grant from DEED VRS. He completed a 16-credit welding certificate program offered through his high school and a partnership with Minnesota West Community and Technical College and SWPIC in November of 2016. He graduated from high school in June of 2017. Trever’s work with SWPIC at school is a part of **Guidepost 1 – School-Based Preparatory Experiences**.



Trever started a welding work experience in July 2017 at CW Welding in Vesta, Minnesota. The work experience was funded through the Disability Employment Initiative. Leah Hastad, Local Disability Resource Coordinator said, “It was great to see Trever excel in his welding training and find a career he loved. He received the most improved student award from his welding instructor.” Trever improved his welding skills and readily learned new skills needed for employment at CW Welding. His work experiences at the school and at CW Welding are a part of **Guidepost 2 – Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning Experiences**. In January of 2018, Trever began full time, unsubsidized employment with CW Welding. Trevor worked and met with other agencies in southwest Minnesota as well as part of **Guidepost 4 – Connecting Activities**. He had a VRS Counselor and an Independent Living Specialist through Southwestern Center for Independent Living (SWCIL). VRS, SWCIL and PIC all worked together to help Trever reach his goals. Trever’s mother kept in contact with the school, VRS, SWCIL and SWPIC about

Trever's progress and plans which is a part of **Guidepost 5 – Family Involvement and Supports**. Trever applied for SSI right out of high school. However, by leveraging the *Guideposts for Success*, additional training, and the employment supports Trever received, he is now able to support himself through full time employment in a high demand field. Trever's success story is evidence of the impact that local partnerships such as the Career Pathways Partnership in Southwest Minnesota can have on young people as they transition from secondary to post-secondary settings as well as from the youth labor force to the adult labor force.

Objective Four: Addressing Minnesota's Employment Disparity

The national unemployment rate in 2018 for people with disabilities 16 years and over was 8% while the labor force participation rate stood at a measly 21%.² For all youth, ages 16-24 in July 2019, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a national unemployment rate of 9%. When broken down by racial demographics, the unemployment rates for youth of color in July 2019 underscores the racial disparities in employment that must be addressed. For example, the unemployment rate for black youth in July 2019 was 14.6% and 11.3% for Hispanic youth. Data compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics regarding youth employment and unemployment have highlighted what some refer to as the "Youth Employment Crisis."³ Another issue impacting youth employment is the significant decline in the labor force participation rate among youth 16-19 years old. Between 1998 and 2014, the labor force participation rate for 16-19-year-olds dropped from 52.8% down to 34.2%. For 16-19-year-olds with no high school diploma, the rate dropped from about 45% to 25% by 2014.⁴

In order to address the disparities in employment that youth of color and youth with disabilities face, the Partners for Youth Career Pathways placed an emphasis on serving youth of color who have a disability. Intentional outreach to culturally specific community-based organizations was conducted by each implementation site to assist with referrals of youth and inform youth about the resources available to them. The PACER Center also played a role in providing the implementation sites with support by offering the expertise of PACER's multicultural liaisons to support families in understanding the education and employment options available to their young person.

Across all three implementation sites, the Partners for Youth Career Pathways project served 108 youth of color in rural Minnesota. This is approximately 24% of all participants served in the Round 7 Youth DEI grant project. By directing services to youth of color Minnesota is directly addressing the education and employment disparities facing communities of color. According to the U. S. Census Bureau and the Minnesota State Demographic Center, Greater Minnesota is home to 11.7% people of color.⁵ Minnesota's service levels to youth of color under the DEI grant exceeds the percent of people of color living in greater Minnesota. Moreover, the youth of color successfully exited from the program earned an average wage

² Bureau of Labor Statistics. (February 26, 2019). Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics – 2018. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>

³ The Rockefeller Foundation. (2014). The Youth Employment Crisis. <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/the-youth-employment-crisis/>

⁴ Canon, M. E., Kudlyak, M., and Liu, Y. (January 26, 2015). Youth Labor Force Participation Continues To Fall, but It Might be for a Good Reason. <https://www.stlouisfed.org/publications/regional-economist/january-2015/youth-labor-force#fig2>

⁵ <http://www.mncompass.org/demographics/race#1-5107-d>

at exit of \$11.80. That average wage at exit is \$1.80 higher than Minnesota’s large employer minimum wage and \$3.65 higher than small business minimum wage. These outcomes highlight the need for youth, especially youth of color in rural Minnesota to engage in paid work experiences. Not only are youth able to learn skills that will set them up for success as they transition to the adult labor force, but the wages they earn can help youth support their families as well as save for future educational expenses. The Partners for Youth Career Pathways project provided \$212,839 directly to youth in the form of wages and fringe benefits. The three sites were also able to leverage an additional \$796,534 from federal and state sources to provide wages and fringe benefits to youth DEI participants. Therefore, a total of \$1,009,373 of critical work experience funds directly support youth with disabilities, many of whom are youth of color and/or have other barriers to employment as described by WIOA Youth eligibility criteria. By providing youth with paid work experiences at wages higher than Minnesota’s minimum wage directly address the economic disparities youth with disabilities and youth of color face in rural Minnesota.

Success Story - RMCEP

August was a WIOA out-of-school youth who was supported by RMCEP through co-enrollments in



Youthbuild, DEI, and the Minnesota Youth Program. August came to RMCEP in July 2017. After discussing options with August, he decided that Youthbuild would be a great option for him to recover and earn the credits he needed to graduate. August graduated from high school in June 2018. After graduation, he was very interested in completing the welding training at [Lynnes Welding](#). August successfully finished the sixteen-week welding course. It was a very special accomplishment for August as he was the first in his family to not only graduate from high school but go on to successfully complete post-secondary education. After

August completed the training in April 2019, he struggled with what type of welding he wanted to specialize in. August, the Youthbuild coordinator, and his RMCEP employment counselor met to discuss available opportunities. Ultimately, August applied for a job at Trail King in West Fargo and was hired on as a welder earning \$21/hour.

Objective Five: Expand Employment Networks in Minnesota

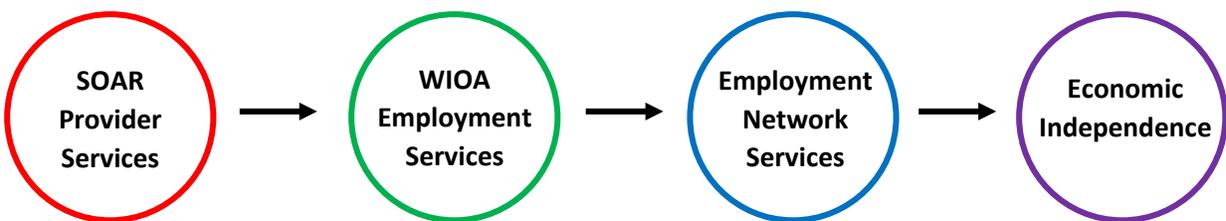
One of Minnesota’s greatest successes achieved under the Round 7 Youth DEI Grant was the expansion of Employment Networks in the state. The Employment Network (EN) model provides the implementation sites with another way to meet the spirit of Section 188 of WIOA by increasing programmatic access to individuals with disabilities. At the beginning of the Partners for Youth Career Pathways project, CMJTS was the only implementation site that had an operational EN. This allowed CMJTS to serve as a peer mentor to the other two implementation sites as they applied to become ENs.

With support from the National Disability Institute, SWPIC and RMCEP decided that becoming an EN under the American Dream Employment Network (ADEN) would make the most business sense. ADEN was an ideal option for the two implementation sites because the subject matter experts at ADEN provided technical assistance the help establish the ENs. Leveraging the Employment Network model will also allow the implementation sites to sustain many of the best practices and effective strategies in serving

individuals with disabilities because of the unrestricted revenue each agency receives when working with Ticket holders.

In order to bolster the services provided under the Employment Networks, staff at all three implementation sites enrolled staff in CWIC trainings to ensure there were many individuals at each agency that had the training and expertise to work with Ticket holders. In addition to the CWIC trainings, the State Lead and the DRCs worked with the Minnesota Department of Human Services to train staff as Benefit Coaches. The training allowed staff to gain a better understanding of the tools in Minnesota that can be leveraged to support individuals with disabilities who are receiving public assistance. The CWIC and Benefits Coach training compliment each other incredibly well and provide staff with a toolbox to address issues holistically. Staff also completed training on using the Disability Benefits 101 and Housing Benefits 101 – two websites that allow individuals and social service providers with tools to help people understand their benefits. Working with individuals to understand their benefits and the impact that working can have on receiving benefit payments is a critical step in supporting individuals as they explore entering the workforce.

To increase access to government assistance programs, SWPIC sought out the opportunity to become a SOAR (SSI/SSDI, Outreach, Access, and Recovery) provider. The SOAR program is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration and is administered by the Social Security Administration. The goal of the program is to help eliminate homelessness among individuals with disabilities who would be eligible to receive SSI and/or SSDI benefits. Much like the Ticket to Work program, SOAR sends payments to providers that help individuals apply for and successfully receive SSI and/or SSDI. This unrestricted revenue will help SWPIC sustain SOAR and Employment Network Services beyond the life of the DEI grant. By becoming a SOAR provider, SWPIC has the capacity to help individuals apply for and receive SSI/SSDI (SOAR), gain employment skills (WIOA), enter the workforce with supports (EN Services), and ultimately, enter the labor force and achieve economic independence.



Success Story – CMJTS

CMJTS staff started working with Clark in 2015 who was receiving services through an H-1B Technical Skills grant. Clark earned an AAS in computer aided drafting and design through a local community college. CMJTS helped him obtain an on-the-job training position as a mechanical drafter supported by the Ticket to Work program. During Clark’s time as a mechanical drafter, he was able to earn two additional credentials. In December 2019, Clark successfully completed the Ticket to Work program. He continues to maintain full-time employment as a Mechanical Detailer earning \$21 per hour. Clark is a example of how the Ticket to Work program can help individuals with disabilities achieve their goal of becoming self-sufficient.

Sustainability

Throughout the life of the Partners for Youth Career Pathways grant project, Minnesota identified ways to ensure that best practices and effective strategies will be sustained not only within WIOA programming of the implementation sites, but also, Minnesota's workforce development system. Intentional efforts to implement best practices and effective strategies have been made through state and local level policy revisions, peer to peer trainings, and conference presentations. In fact, there have been a number of best practices and effective strategies developed under Minnesota's grant that has been implemented in other states such as New York, Iowa, Colorado, and Cherokee Nation (Oklahoma).

The WDAs in Minnesota receive state-funded youth employment grants through the Minnesota Youth Program. This program often serves as a steppingstone for youth before enrolling in WIOA programming. This funding will allow the implementation sites and Minnesota's WDAs in continuing best practices and effective strategies developed under the Partners for Youth Career Pathways project. By establishing two new Employment Networks under this grant opportunity, Minnesota will have more opportunities for individuals with disabilities seeking services through the workforce development system. Providing other WDAs with information about the benefits of Employment Networks will be essential in Minnesota's process to sustain best practices and effective strategies moving forward. Lastly, peer to peer trainings and ongoing professional development regarding the most impactful ways to support youth with disabilities achieve their education and employment goals will be critical to ensuring Minnesota's workforce development system is sustaining the efforts of the Partners for Youth Career Pathways project.

Final Cumulative Data

PARTICIPANT SUMMARY INFORMATION (CUMULATIVE)			
Total Participants Served		444	Percentages
Gender	A. Male	274	62%
	B. Female	170	38%
Age	A. 14 – 15	65	15%
	B. 16 – 17	196	44%
	C. 18	88	20%
	D. 19 – 21	75	17%
	E. 22 - 24	19	4%
Ethnicity / Race	A. Hispanic/Latino	70	16%
	B. American Indian or Alaska Native	21	5%
	C. Asian or Pacific Islander	4	1%
	D. Black or African American	13	3%
	E. White	385	87%
Primary Disability	A. Physical/Chronic Health Condition	26	6%
	B. Physical/ Mobility Impairment	6	1%
	C. Mental or Psychiatric Disability	213	48%
	D. Physical and Mental Impairment	18	4%
	E. Vision-Related Disability	1	0%
	F. Hearing-Related Disability	6	1%
	G. Learning Disability	80	18%

	H. Cognitive/ Intellectual Disability	100	23%
	I. Did Not Disclose	4	1%
Education Level	A. 8 th grade or under – 11 th Grade	333	75%
	B. 12 th Grade Completed, No Diploma	10	2%
	C. High School graduate or equivalent	95	21%
	D. Post-Secondary Education	6	1%
Other	A. Limited English Proficient	2	0%
	B. Youth From Families Receiving Public Assistance	159	36%
	C. Youth receiving SSI or SSDI	47	11%
	D. Foster Youth	25	6%
	E. High School Drop-Out	22	5%
	F. Youth Offender	41	9%
	G. Pregnant or Parenting Youth	10	2%
	H. Basic Skills Deficient	270	61%
	I. Homeless or Runaway Youth	6	1%
	J. Not Employed at Program Enrollment	270	61%
PROGRAM SERVICES, ACTIVITIES, AND OTHER RELATED ASSISTANCE			
	A. Participated in Activities Related to Guidepost 1: School- Based Preparatory Experiences	331	75%
	B. Participated in Activities Related to Guidepost 2: Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning Experiences	443	100%

C. Participated in Activities Related to Guidepost 3: Youth Development and Leadership	269	61%
D. Participated in Activities Related to Guidepost 4: Connecting Activities	387	87%
E. Participated in Activities Related to Guidepost 5: Family Involvement and Supports	286	64%
F. Participated in Integrated Resource Team (IRT)	258	58%
G. Co-Enrolled in WIOA Youth or Adult	189	43%
H. Co-Enrolled in MYP	313	70%
INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE		
A. Attained Work Readiness or Education Goals	284	64%
B. Received Academic Credit or Service Learning Credit	97	22%
C. Remained in School or Dropout Returned to School	92	21%
D. Obtained High School Diploma, GED, Certificate or Degree	118	27%
E. Entered Post Secondary Education, Vocational/Occupational Skills Training, or Apprenticeship	48	11%
F. Entered Military or Unsubsidized Employment	125	28%
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION		
A. Number of participants rating experience as "Excellent"	41	9%
B. Number of participants rating experience as "Very Good"	38	9%
C. Number of participants rating experience as "Average"	9	2%
D. Number of participants rating experience as "Below Average"	2	0%

E. Number of participants rating experience as "Poor"	2	0%
F. Total Number of Surveys Completed	94	21%