

MWCA Best Practices SUBMISSION FORM

WIB Name/WSA: Dakota-Scott Submitted by Mark Jacobs

**Attach a description (no more than two pages) describing the innovative best practice.
Please consider addressing the following points:**

- **Overview describing the innovative best practice**

Dakota County Car CARE, (Creating Avenues to Rewarding Employment), originated when students of the Dakota County Technical College (DCTC) met with Dakota County staff to explore ways to meet the service learning requirements within their Automotive program. The students were interested in ways to connect their technical training in car repair with their desire to do good things for and within the community. Dakota County has considerable transportation barriers to employment, and a collaboration that would help clients get and maintain personal vehicles was an ideal way to address such a barrier.

Dakota County Car CARE has three components. Program components consist of clinics and classes provided at no cost to the attendees and low-interest loans for vehicles. The clinics and classes are designed to help clients maintain their vehicles longer, and avoid costly malfunctions that could be avoided with proper car care.

#1 - Dakota County Car CARE Clinics

Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) participants drive their cars directly to the garage of DCTC, where they are served by the automotive students and their instructors. Clients receive:

- Oil Changes
- Coolant and Transmission flush
- Replacement of air & fuel filters & PCV valves
- Replacement of belts & hoses as needed
- Headlight & exterior bulb replacement & alignment
- Windshield wiper blade replacement
- Winter readiness check
- 20 point vehicle inspection
- Proper child car seat installation check

#2 - Car CARE Classes

The classes take place at DCTC during times that accommodate working clients. The participants drive their cars into the DCTC garages, where they learn from students and instructors how to care for their own car. The intent is that being informed about small things one can do now can help avoid large repair bills in the future. Topics covered include:

- Tire changes: learn how to remove and replace a flat tire with the vehicle's spare tire.
- Preventative maintenance schedule: DCTC creates a schedule for each client's vehicle make and model, and teaches them how to use the schedule.
- Tire pressure & adjustment: learn how to use tire gauges and properly adjust the tire pressure to vehicle specifications, learn how to judge tires' safety.
- Fluid inspection: learn how to check fluid levels, safety of the fluids in car and what the proper fluids are.
- Proper use & installation of child safety seats
- How to inspect & replace exterior bulbs
- Windshield maintenance: learn how to clean the windshield properly and inspect and replace wiper blades.

For attending class clients also received a FREE Winter Survival Care Kit, \$30.00 in gas cards and a tour of the College. The tour provides a chance for clients to begin thinking of post secondary options they may not have previously considered.

#3 - Car CARE access

The access element of Car CARE allows clients who would not normally be eligible for low interest car loans or car donations to gain access to such vehicles. DCTC receives donated vehicles that the Automotive Program uses to train student mechanics. Rather than training on these vehicles over and over, the students repair the vehicles to driver safe status. The vehicles are then donated or sold to the client at a very low rate. To be eligible, the client must have a transportation barrier to employment, and it is expected that the client will gain and maintain employment through use of the vehicle. Low interest loans are provided for the vehicles through People Responding in Social Ministry, (PRISM).

- **Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)**

The impact on this program is significant for job seekers. It's designed primarily for MFIP recipients who are either in low-wage jobs or are seeking work. All the clients have a transportation barrier to employment. For many living in rural or suburban areas without public transportation, transportation may be their only true barrier to employment. Providing vehicles and the resources and knowledge to maintain one's own vehicle allows clients reliable transportation for their family and to/from work. There is also an important safety component to having reliable transportation. Thus far, 3 clinics have been held with 45 people attending; 3 classes with 41 people in attendance and 3 vehicles have been given out to clients. Client responses have been overwhelmingly positive. Most classes and clinics are fully booked within 48 hours of opening registrations.

- **Community impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)**

The program has an impact on the community from multiple angles. First, the DCTC students who are working with the clients have shown significant pride in the results of their work. This is a valuable stepping-stone for them in their professional development and it's rewarding for them to see the benefit of providing a community service and the positive impact they can have on others lives.

DCTC benefits by providing their students with a valuable experience but also by the increased exposure their institution receives by having the students on-site.

Employers of the clients benefit by the clients having reliable transportation increasing their ability to make and keep business commitments. Employers also benefit from the clients having direct contact with a post-secondary institution. The clients receive tours of the facility along with information about the many different educational tracks offered, encouraging a more skilled workforce.

The community is impacted through safer vehicles on the roads of Dakota County. The community also has the opportunity to give back to those in need, by donating vehicles to the project.

- **Identification of those involved, including collaborators**

Helene Woods, Program Developer, Dakota-Scott Workforce Services; Bob Engberg, Automotive Technology Instructor, DCTC; Jeff Copeland, Automotive Technology Instructor, DCTC; Mike Opp, Dean of Transportation and Industry, DCTC; Trudi Greaves, Program Officer, DCTC Foundation; Dakota-Scott Workforce Investment Board; Elizabeth Johnson, Executive Director, PRISM; Darlene Williams, Transportation Manager, PRISM

- **Leveraging/alignment of outside resources –**

The alignment with DCTC was key. The innovation of the students was refreshing and inspiring as they truly wanted to connect their professional expertise with bettering the community. The college was a key player as an institution as they found a way to utilize their facilities and faculty expertise to transition the idea from a concept to a viable and popular program offering. The other key external resource was PRISM to whom the donated vehicles titles are transferred to after they are made driver ready. PRISM then works with the clients and their Employment Counselors to either donate the vehicle directly to the client, or to provide a low interest loan for the vehicle for those that would benefit from building their credit. Most car payments are under \$100 and fully paid within 2 years.

- **Ideas for replication/lessons learned**

The program would be easily replicable by other areas. Key components are an interested training institution with the facilities to a) do the oil changes and mechanical repairs; b) area for classroom training. The primary challenge to the implementation was working through potential liability issues with the donated cars. However, the arrangement between DCTC and PRISM has taken care of that concern.