



## MWCA Best Practices

### SUBMISSION FORM

WIB Name/WSA: **Ramsey County Workforce Solutions (WSA 15)**

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#### **Incumbent Worker ESL**

Workforce Solutions has recently concluded a special project demonstrating the viability of voice recognition software integrated into a curriculum to teach occupational English to Environmental Services (ES) workers in six East Metro Hospitals. The 27-hour curriculum was developed jointly with managers and supervisors from the hospital ES/Housekeeping departments. Forty Limited English Proficient (LEP) incumbent workers were selected between the hospitals and participated in a twelve-week program, three hours per week, to learn English they need and use on the job.

Business Services staff from Workforce Solutions provided the instruction, which included helping workers use voice recognition software and facilitating language mentoring between the workers and their supervisors. The software allows English language learners to go at their own pace, getting instant feedback on how well they are speaking the phrases and words. The written curriculum gave the learners a chance to then talk with one another and the instructor about the lesson and engage directly with their supervisor using the learned English phrases and words.

Forty percent of the participants experienced a full Student Proficiency Level increase between their start and finish of the training. Given the short time frame for the training, this was an outstanding achievement. Two side benefits were an improvement in comprehension of the English and cultural competence. These were outcomes not identified at the outset of the project but no less important than being able to better speak English.

The impact is quite significant for the employers and the incumbent workers. Supervisor comments regarding worker outcomes focused largely on the dramatic increase in worker confidence. In some cases, workers were able to do job tasks without being shown which translates into timesavings for supervisory staff. Other benefits were patient care staff being able to better communicate with ES workers and these workers being able to ask for clarification if they did not understand. A small number of the participants have either taken on leadership responsibilities or career laddered to direct patient care. Other participants were taking additional English language classes at community ABE programs.

The hospitals involved with this project were: Regions, Gillette Children's Specialty Care, United, and three HealthEast hospitals. The Environmental Services/Housekeeping managers and supervisors were intimately involved with curriculum development and mentoring their workers with the curriculum. A huge benefit was the relationship developed between workers and their supervisors.

Workforce Solutions partnered with Language Solutions LLC, a small private sector company to develop the curriculum and software. Language Solutions trained Workforce Solutions staff, who then did the on-site training in the hospitals. The financial underpinning of the project was a Department of Labor appropriation and WIA incentive funds through the Minnesota Department of Education and approved by the WSA WIB. Additional contribution was made by the hospitals in the form of wages since the training occurred during work

time. This was an important aspect of the project and because it was during regular work hours, there was 100% attendance and completion on the part of the students.

The intent for Workforce Solutions Business Services Unit is to continue this type of work with area employers. The hospitals are in discussion about continuing the project with new curriculum that would be used by a broader set of workers. Options for delivery will also be developed and discussed as a way to manage the overall cost. Other industries could benefit from the model developed since it relies heavily on teaching workers how to use technology and supervisors how to interact with their workers around a specific occupational curriculum.