



MWCA Best Practices

SUBMISSION FORM

WIB Name/WSA: **Ramsey County Workforce Solutions (WSA #15)**
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On The Frontline: Creating A Micro-TWE Transitional Work Experience Close to Home

Overview

Workforce Solutions is the administrative entity for the jobs and training programs operating under the authority of the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners and is a representation of their investment and interest in workforce development within Ramsey County.

Workforce Solutions provides employment services to residents on the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) through six community based organizational partners, as well as providing direct services through three Workforce Solutions units. Four of these partners, plus two other agencies, have separate staff units providing transitional work experiences (TWE) to clients. TWE is an important component of the Ramsey County employment services strategy for service.

All of the employment service providers can make referrals of job ready individuals to one of the TWE programs offering a variety of work opportunities in production, social services, manufacturing, retail and customer support areas.

This referral system sends clients, sometimes at considerable distance, to unfamiliar settings and unfamiliar programs. Not only is this physical distance a challenge but the relational distance, working with unfamiliar staff, can be formidable for some clients.

In 2007, a frontline employment guidance counselor in the Workforce Solutions Assisted Services unit convinced her Supervisor and Director to make it possible to provide a small scale TWE program to the unit's clients who were not interested in the transitional work experiences offered through the other agencies. Underlying this request was the awareness that some of the clients would not be as work ready as the other transitional work experience programs desired. Existing relationships and close support by the employment guidance counselor in a coaching role made it possible to support six clients at a time in the unit's fledgling "Changing Lives One Bite At A Time" work experience program.

Workforce Solutions management was interested in exploring the role of individual driven innovation in system change and service delivery. This, and other initiatives, conceived and championed by front-line staff, were a means of demonstrating that individuals are powerful in a bureaucratic system. Could a micro-program, carried out amidst the other duties and responsibilities of an employment guidance counselor make a difference in the participant lives?

Impact on Job Seekers

In late 2007 and through 2008, seventeen individuals were placed in work experience positions in health food and retail produce settings, and by late 2008, placements were primarily in office assistance roles within another large Ramsey County department. In early 2009, the micro-program

expanded to several other county departments and units, while at the same time going through its own transition as the original champion and counselor moved to another position in a different unit. With another counselor, still with a caseload comparable to the other counselors in the unit, guiding the initiative, sixty-nine referrals were accepted between January and June, 2009, Fifty-eight individuals went through the TWE program orientation, and twenty-six were placed in transitional work experience positions paying \$7.25 an hour. Additional sites are in development for another twenty individuals. During this time period, five participants went on to accept unsubsidized employment. The hallmark of the micro-program continued to be close communication between the counselor-as-coach, the participant, the participant's job counselor and the worksite supervisor.

In comparison, the other six transitional work experience providers, each with three to five assigned staff, accepted six-hundred and twenty referrals and placed three hundred and twenty-six individuals in transitional work positions. Sixty-five individuals went on to accept unsubsidized employment,

During the first half of 2009, the micro-program, with proportionate results to the other programs, employed twenty-six participants who, either due to interest in the office environment work, or interested in reducing the physical and relational distance between them and their support system, chose this program over the others.

Community Impact, Collaborators and Leveraging Outside Resources

Existing relationships between staff in differing county departments created the opportunities for matching an interested participant to an interested unit worksite. Permanent county employees in a variety of roles have had the opportunity to directly assist MFIP participants in regaining on-the-job skills and to develop confidence for future job search.

Workforce Solution participants have been placed in several Community Human Services units, Mental Health Services, Public Health Environmental Services, Business Services, Property Management, a suburban City Manager's office, two City of St. Paul departments, and an alternate care nursing home. The relationship with the City of St. Paul department has lead to referrals to local minority owned businesses interested in assisting, and being assisted by, participants in the micro-transitional work experience program. Discussions with a large health care provider, with fifteen locations, willing to add a wage subsidy to bring MFIP transitional work experience participant salaries to a level comparable to other employees is underway.

The willingness of Workforce Solutions Management to invest in the innovative commitment of frontline staff led to new ways to invest in the lives of MFIP participants. At the same time, this willingness helped frontline staff to engage a wide variety of county employees, their community partners and ally agencies in the business of changing lives.