



MWCA Best Practices

SUBMISSION FORM

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

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Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) Services for Young Parents in Ramsey County

Overview

Ramsey County Workforce Solutions is committed to promoting the well being and economic stability of young families. To accomplish this goal, Workforce Solutions, in collaboration with other County departments and service providers, developed an innovative model to address the specialized developmental and educational needs of young parents that promotes parent-child health, high school graduation, career development, and, ultimately, economic stability.

In 2003, with the support of the County Board, representatives from Workforce Solutions, Community Human Services, and St. Paul-Ramsey County Public Health worked together to develop a program designed to streamline and enhance MFIP services as well as address the health and parenting needs of all teens on MFIP in Ramsey County. Critical review of the literature on the risks associated with teen parenting and the results of the State's MFIP Long-Term Adolescent Parent study guided program development. In this unique delivery model, employment services' responsibilities are merged with public health nurse home visiting services for pregnant and parenting teens under the age of nineteen and their children. Financial workers are paired with public health nurses to enhance communication and identify system issues that negatively influence teen parent and child outcomes. The model focuses on relationship-based practices that enhance the well-being and trust of young parents. Recognizing the benefit of developing specialized MFIP services for young families, Workforce Solutions also issued a Request for Proposal for employment services (ES) to parents over the age of 18 and under the age of 22 who choose to work, graduate from high school or complete a GED. HIRED was selected as the agency to provide these services and began program implementation January 1, 2009. To address disparities and provide culturally-respectful services, the American Indian Family Center (AIFC) works in collaboration with Workforce Solutions, employment services and financial assistance partners, and public health nurses.

In 2008, new State requirements and monitoring of summer activities of teen parents in high school or completing a GED created another opportunity for program development. Staff from Workforce Solutions, St. Paul-Ramsey County Public Health and Goodwill Industries, Inc./Easter Seals (GWES) worked together to meet the developmental and educational needs of teen parents by creating a four-week paid work and career exploration program available during the month of August. This specialized program offered teen parents supervised work and case management services. An eleven week and four week program was developed for the summer of 2009, providing teen parents new experiences in dealing with workplace responsibilities and challenges in a supportive, relationship-based environment. Staff from GWES communicate frequently with the teen parent's public health nurse. Another example of Workforce Solutions' partnerships includes working with housing agencies that provide service to young parents. This collaboration among housing providers, ES staff, financial workers, and public health meet monthly for training on program regulations, discussion of service-delivery challenges, and trouble-shooting to address common problems experienced by young parents.

Jobseeker Impact

The work being done by Workforce Solutions and its partners has resulted in a model that works effectively to serve young parent families on MFIP. Key features of this service model include:

Shared Vision of Success- is supported by the community for young MFIP families. It is based on the program's focus of assisting young parents to complete high school or a GED, and preparing them to secure and maintain employment that will sustain their family needs while learning to become effective parents who enhance their own child's development. This shared vision benefits young parents as partners work to identify common system's issues that negatively impact young parent outcomes, provide effective tools to help teens navigate through a very complex MFIP system, and provide age-appropriate educational and job seeking skills and training, parenting classes, and mentoring opportunities.

Trusting Partnership- a foundation of authentic trust exists between all partners working with young MFIP participants. This trust is maintained by a constant level of communication between all parties. This initiative streamlines the programs and provides participants the benefit of small team working together to ensure necessary supports are provided.

Community Based Services- services are provided at various sites throughout the community, including at a variety of schools, creating a level of convenience that encourages learning and supports achievement. Public health nurses meet the teen parents in their home or school and conduct group sessions with participants at financial workers' offices housed in community locations, including at HIREd and the AIFC. Co-location in the community facilitates working collaboratively with ES staff and allows for easy access to financial and employment services. Goodwill Industries, Inc./Easter Seals provides curriculum and work experience opportunities for young parents on MFIP at work sites located throughout the community that are easily accessible, which is imperative for youth dependent on public transportation.

Culturally Competent Services- the American Indian Family Center (AIFC) provides holistic, family-centered services, including ES and financial assistance for young parents on MFIP. All staff working at the AIFC is trained in providing culturally-respectful services to American Indian persons. Cultural training is provided upon request, including topics such as American Indian history, culture, and communication styles; these trainings have been extremely beneficial for staff and participants alike. Workforce Solutions also contracts with eight professionals in the community to provide mental health and vocational assessments for MFIP participants. These age-appropriate and culturally-respectful services allow participants to obtain services that enhance mental health and provide realistic guidance on work-related activities and program eligibility. For young teens, the cognitive, vocational, and mental health assessments are critical to effectively meeting their needs, identifying effective resources, and assuring that their plans meet their educational abilities.

Community Impact

The Ramsey County Youth At-Risk Committee shared with the Board the following summary of findings, which supports the message heard by Workforce Solutions from community partners, employers, and young MFIP families:

It is critical that children and youth are healthy, well educated, and safe and that all children, regardless of race, immigration status, or income have the opportunity to achieve. Research indicates that failure to invest in the healthy development of young children leads to significant problems, particularly for those children living in poverty. Failed school experiences, an untrained workforce, lower wages, dependence on public assistance, involvement in the criminal justice system, and cyclical poverty all come at a significant price. By investing now in prevention and early intervention services, the County can help provide children with the foundation they need to flourish.

This innovative service-delivery model focuses on developing services and resources that comprehensively address the developmental, educational, and vocational needs of young parents and their children. It is anticipated that the program's significant focus on high school graduation and career exploration will help reduce future personal costs to the young parents and their children, as well as reduce their dependence on public assistance programs. The program's goal is to move families out of poverty, not just off of MFIP.

Partners

Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, Community Human Services, Workforce Solutions
St. Paul-Ramsey County Public Health, Ramsey County/metro area employers, Public/Charter Schools in Ramsey County
American Indian Family Center, HIREd, Goodwill Industries, Inc./Easter Seals Minnesota
Ramsey County community agencies and individuals serving youth and their families
Ramsey County housing agencies serving young parent families, community mental health professionals

Leveraging/Alignment of Outside Resources

New connections will continue to be formed within the community and County system to ensure that investment in this initiative is broadened. Potential partners include: Ramsey County Child Protection/Child Services, Foster Care/Child Support, Ramsey County Suburban Schools, Workforce Investment Board, and MNSCU. Current partners have also invested in this initiative through alternative funding streams, further enhancing MFIP services.

Ideas for Replication/Lessons Learned

Evidence of the program's effectiveness is most clearly reflected in the high school graduation rates of teen parents enrolled in this collaboration serving young teen parents. The National Campaign indicates that 64% of children born to a single teen parent who does not complete high school will grow up in poverty. In 2003, at the time of this program's inception, the high school graduation rate of teen parents on MFIP in Ramsey County was 33%. In 2008, the high school graduation and GED completion rate of the teen parent population was 64.2%. The summer GWES program continues to enrich the lives of teens and a number have improved their school attendance and progress, knowing that if they were compliant with their MFIP school plan, they would be eligible for the GWES summer program.

This government-community initiative can be replicated in other settings by colleagues interested in partnering with a true desire to work effectively with young parents on MFIP to help them attain self-sufficiency and enhance well-being.