



MWCA 2006 Best Practices Recognition

OVERVIEW

One of MWCA's Goals for 2006 was to encourage and share best practices among members.

In addition to setting aside time to share ideas and discuss innovative initiatives at the Annual Meeting in Duluth, MWCA will honor up to three Workforce Investment Boards whose innovative efforts and collaboration had a positive impact in their Workforce Service Area. These awards will recognize efforts to think innovatively, leverage resources, and benefit both jobseekers and the greater community.

NOMINATION GUIDELINES

MWCA encourages each WIB to submit at least one nomination.

Please complete the attached nomination form, and no more than two pages describing the initiative. Include a discussion of how the Board's efforts support MWCA's goals of ensuring that both employers and workers have the resources and skills Minnesota needs to remain competitive.

JUDGING CRITERIA

Judges will be selected and announced shortly. Judges will evaluate each nomination and award points based solely on the information you provide in the nomination information. The categories and possible points are:

Criteria for Selection of Outstanding Best Practices	Maximum Points
Overview describing the innovative best practice	25
Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)	25
Community impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)	20
Identification of those involved, including collaborators	15
Leveraging/alignment of outside resources	10
Ability for use or replication by others	05

DEADLINE: *Please submit nominations by close of business Thursday, July 27, 2006.*

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

Trish Taylor phone: (612) 770-8934 e-mail: ttaylor818@yahoo.com

Anne Olson phone: (651) 224-3344 e-mail: aolson@mncounites.org



MWCA 2006 BEST PRACTICES RECOGNITION NOMINATION FORM

WIB Name/WSA Duluth Workforce Council/WSA #4

Submitted by Don Hoag, Manager – Duluth Workforce Development

Attach a description (no more than two pages) describing the initiative.

Please return via e-mail or fax to Anne Olson by **Thursday, July 27.**
aolson@mncounties.org or (651) 224-6540

 (Leave this section blank -to be completed by judges)

Judge # _____

Criteria for Selection of Outstanding Best Practices	Maximum Points	Points Awarded
Overview describing the innovative best practice	25	
Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)	25	
Community impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)	20	
Identification of those involved, including collaborators	15	
Leveraging/alignment of outside resources	10	
Ability for use or replication by others	05	
TOTAL:	100	

MWCA 2006 Best Practices Recognition
Duluth Workforce Council, WSA #4
“Project SOS – School Outside of a School”

Overview

Project SOS, or “School Outside of a School”, was conceived by Paul Brandstaetter, a member of the Duluth Workforce Council and the Chair of its Youth Council. Paul is the Principal of Unity High School, Duluth’s alternative high school. When the Duluth school district was notified in the summer of 2005 of a grant funding opportunity, Paul approached Duluth Workforce Development (“DWD”) and LifeHouse (a community based organization serving homeless and seriously at-risk youth) about a three-way collaboration with the school district.

Paul’s concept was a program in which students could complete educational activities in a non-traditional setting, but for the first time be awarded school district credit for their work. Classes and activities were held at LifeHouse in a non-threatening and casual environment. Duluth Workforce Development provided a licensed teacher to participate in classes and activities, and to serve as an individual tutor. Our youth job counselors were also involved.

The project has been active for about 8 months, and already 44 youth have participated. There are several significant indicators of success: 7 students have earned a combined 12 school district credits, while the remainder all have documented hours which could eventually contribute to credits as they continue their work. An additional 5 students have earned a High School diploma or GED, and one more has passed 3 of the 5 GED sections. One project, in which 12 participants were involved, led to their recognition as “St. Louis County Volunteers of the Year.”

In recognition of the project’s success, DEED has notified us that it will present Paul Brandstaetter with an award at an upcoming regional Youth summit meeting in August (this may not be public knowledge yet).

Jobseeker Impact

The project was designed primarily with educational outcomes in mind, and was successful in this. The school district had not previously allowed credit to be earned in non-traditional ways. In doing so, more at-risk youth are reconnecting with the school system (earning credits in this way has proven to be an incentive to them). In terms of jobseeker impact, success may be shown in the following ways:

- The program proved to be a useful “stepping stone” into the WIA youth programs. The WIA performance standards usually lead to a situation where we must scrutinize an individual’s ability to benefit from services before enrolling. Through Project SOS, we were able to build relationships and observe the commitment of youth who could be considered “most in need”, leading to an increased willingness to enroll them in WIA programs. Several were enrolled who might not otherwise have been. These participants had access to paid work experiences.
- As a result of the paid work experiences, at least one participant obtained full time employment, while the remainder began to learn “soft skills” in what was usually their first employment-related experience – in addition to learning the skills required on the job.
- The attainment of credentials such as a high school diploma or GED will contribute to enhanced employment potential in the future.

- Reconnecting students with the education system may also lead to participation in post-secondary training, enabling the students to obtain or enhance skills required to be employed in demand occupations which pay a living wage, and not to become “stuck” in entry level or low wage positions.

Community Outcomes

In addition to the successes on the educational and employment front, participation in the project helped several youth stabilize their personal situations. We have documented examples of participants obtaining much needed services such as treatment for depression, substance abuse and making progress on personal issues (e.g. obtaining stable housing). These activities helped LifeHouse achieve its mission of assisting seriously at-risk youth. The importance of helping such participants move out of crisis and onto a productive path cannot be underestimated.

Identification of Partners

Funder: Southern St. Louis County Family Services Collaborative (“the Collaborative”).

Project Partners: Independent School District 709 (Duluth Public Schools), Duluth Workforce Development, LifeHouse.

Leveraging/Alignment of Resources

Although the school district was eligible for grant funding from the Collaborative, most of the grant funding was subgranted to the other partners to cover their operating and staff expenses related to the project. These extra resources enabled both DWD and LifeHouse to serve individuals they may not have otherwise served, and to successfully assist a significant number of youth to engage in productive activities, furthering the mission of both agencies simultaneously. Of perhaps equal importance is the “stepping stone” model. By establishing a relationship with the participants, we were able to determine their level of commitment and became willing to enroll several into our WIA programs. This should lead to more successful outcomes and improved WIA performance. Additionally, the project showed that systems can be changed in order to enhance outcomes – without the willingness of the school district to award credit for these activities (which it had not done before), it is unlikely the project would have been as successful.

Ability for Use by Others

We believe this model has the potential to be replicated in other locations, depending on the willingness of local school districts to embrace the concept of awarding credit for non-traditional activities. The partners in Project SOS would be willing to be an information resource to assist. In addition, we believe the model could be applied in other program areas, such as WIA Adult. Partnering (instead of competing) with community and/or faith based organizations can enhance the ability to obtain additional funding. These projects, which do not have the WIA performance standards attached, can then serve as “stepping stone” projects, or provide a new point of entry into WIA programs. Because the new WIA enrollees will have built a relationship with the WSAs, and have demonstrated a level of commitment, future WIA performance should be enhanced.