
MINNESOTA BEST PRACTICES: Youth Resource Mapping Internships

Overview of Project: The PACER Center is partnering with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Pathways to Employment (PTE), and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Office of Youth Development on Project C3, which includes an innovative website that locates community resources in the areas of employment, education and community support for youth, with and without disabilities, and their families. The web based resource map (www.C3MN.org) and transition clearinghouse (www.C3online.org) represent the cutting edge in searchable tools that allow youth, families and professionals the ability to find resources best suited to their needs.

Youth with disabilities are employed as interns in this project, contacting community organizations by mail, phone, and in person to recruit agencies to list their service information on the website at no cost. The youth also enter data into the website's database and present information on the project and partner organizations to community groups. The youth earn a wage and usually academic credit while developing pre-employment and career exploration skills. Students participate in curriculum related to pre-employment skills, presentation skills, career exploration and additional activities. The curriculum teaches the skills necessary to pursue and seek educational and career paths.

Outreach to Youth with Disabilities: Youth interns have been recruited through relationships with workforce and education partners.

Job Seeker Impact: Approximately one hundred youth with disabilities in six regions of Minnesota have been hired as paid mapping interns, developing marketable skills and valuable work history. The interns are youth who may not otherwise have access to paid internship opportunities. Project C3 is extending workforce development programming to more youth with disabilities through its partnerships with Workforce Service Areas, and these youth are also typically engaged in complimentary academic programming in their schools. Students are developing confidence, maturity, and professionalism through improved social skills, phone skills, public speaking skills, organizational skills and computer experience. Youth have the opportunity to meet professionals from a variety of agencies in the immediate and surrounding communities to get a foot in the door for future positions and careers. In fact, several of the youth interns have gained competitive employment using the skills they learned from participating in Project C3.

Community Impact: Project C3's resource mapping, professional staff capacity building, and facilitated collaborative efforts have improved the local workforce system's ability to provide services to youth with disabilities. The high profile of the C3 mapping effort has also raised awareness within workforce development about issues encountered in serving the neediest youth, including youth with disabilities. The unique

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collaborations utilized to make the resource mapping internships successful also yield benefits for partners such as improved community visibility, information dissemination, and interagency communication.

Alignment of Resources: State agencies, local workforce and community agencies, and secondary and post-secondary education partners all contribute to the success of Project C3. Originally funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), the continuation and expansion of Project C3 in the absence of ODEP funding has occurred through funding from PTE, MDE and DEED.

The PACER Center, a non-profit organization that provides information to Minnesota families and professionals serving all youth with disabilities, has led the effort to develop the most visible product of the project, a searchable website listing hundreds of resources to help youth as they transition to adulthood. Development of the website has engaged partners in other community-based organizations, who enter information about their services and agencies into the Project C3 database.

Alternative schools and local workforce development agencies provide staff to oversee the mapping activities carried out by the youth interns and space for the youth to use while working on the project. In some areas, post-secondary students or AmeriCorps interns are engaged as lead workers, providing additional oversight and mentoring to the students. Educational agencies in some areas are also providing academic credit for the youth working on this project.

Replicability:

The web-based resource mapping and student intern model could certainly be replicated in any area of the country. It would be an appropriate model to use with any target population, including homeless youth or returning veterans. For additional information, visit www.c3online.org and click on "Contact Us".

For more information on the local experience with youth resource mapping internships, contact:

Northeast MN Region

Steve Schoenbauer
Transition-Career Experience-NCLB
Northern Lights Special Ed. Cooperative
302 14th St.
Cloquet, MN 55720
218/879-1283 ext. 6018
sschoenbauer@nlsec.k12.mn.us

Central MN Region

Rita Borchert
Youth Programs Manager
Central MN Jobs & Training Services
106 Pine St.
Monticello, MN 55362
763/271-3706
rborchert@cmjts.org

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Twin Cities – West Metro Region

Ellie Emanuel
Disability Program Navigator
South Minneapolis WorkForce Center
777 E. Lake St.
Minneapolis, MN 55407
612/821-4018
Ellie.Emanuel@state.mn.us

Twin Cities – East Metro Region

Terri Trexler, Ed.D.
Dakota County CTIC Facilitator
ISD 917
1300 145th St. E.
Rosemount, MN 55068
651/423-8426
terri.trexler@isd917.k12.mn.us

South Central MN Region

Heather Olson
Assistant Director
South Central Workforce Council
464 Raintree Rd.
Mankato, MN 56001
507/345-2418
holson@mvac.mankato.mn.us

Southeast MN Region

Marge Kuethe
Youth Programs Coordinator
Workforce Development, Inc.
1302 Seventh St. NW
Rochester, MN 55901
507/379-3409
mkuethe@wfdi.ws