
MINNESOTA BEST PRACTICES: Reaching Youth in Juvenile Diversion Programs

Agency: Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training, Aitkin County

Coordination of Activities between Employment and Training Staff, Aitkin County Health and Human Services and Corrections Staff to Improve Services to Youth in Juvenile Diversion Programs.

Overview: Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training works with youth ages 14-21 who have a strong likelihood of dropping out of high school due to: juvenile court participation, chemical dependency issues, family life situations resulting in group home placement or social service intervention, homelessness, runaway situations, teen parenting, disabilities, economic hardship, and English language deficiencies.

Counselors work one-on-one with referred students, identifying problems and developing an individualized plan for continued education and job preparation. The Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training may also help with support services such as transportation, clothing or childcare, when they present a barrier to the completion of established goals.

The goals of the program are to assist and encourage eligible youth to complete high school, explore careers, prepare for job competition, develop personal goals, pursue post-secondary education, and gain work experience.

Alignment of Resources: Aitkin is a rural county where agencies choose to work together to make the best use of their limited staff and financial resources. Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training implements WIA/MYP programs in the counties served and provides access to these resources for youth involved in the juvenile court system. Access to the WorkForce Center and all of its resources are available to youth, including training funding.

The importance of collaboration between the Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training, Aitkin County Juvenile Diversion, and area partners focuses on three key areas: information, relationships, and talent. These areas help us provide a comprehensive framework for assisting youth who are involved in the juvenile diversion system.

Information: Information sharing between agencies is strong due to the efforts of the Aitkin County Collaborative. Funding throughout Aitkin County has been maximized by combining our local resources and maximizing their potential. The Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training has provided resources regarding careers, labor market information, and employment opportunities for youth involved in the Juvenile Diversion program. The Juvenile Diversion program has video and book resources for the WorkForce Center to utilize in their youth training programs. Additionally, the Juvenile

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Diversion Coordinator has presented information on the topics of communication and the importance of positive self-image to youth involved in employment and training programs.

Relationships: Relationships have been built with key individuals in the school districts of Aitkin, Hill City, and McGregor, Aitkin County Health and Human Services, Corrections, local nonprofits, businesses, and civic organizations. These relationships have provided the Juvenile Diversion program with information for programming and funding.

Talent: The Juvenile Diversion Coordinator works with area businesses, nonprofits, and individuals to develop community learning positions where young offenders perform community service. Focus is spent on providing youth with experiences that will not only fill their service requirement but will also provide an educational experience. Church groups and mentoring programs have provided opportunities for youth to complete their service requirements and learn the importance of community in their lives. Additionally, Aitkin County has a pool of educated and talented individuals who provide services and programming to families and youth involved in the Juvenile Diversion program.

The combination of these three key factors are vital to the overall success of our services and programming in Aitkin County. Information, relationships, and talent were utilized at a "Take Back the Night" event held in Aitkin. The free carnival was chaired by the Juvenile Diversion Coordinator and the event was sponsored by a group of nonprofit and civic organizations. Marketing was performed by agencies such as the WorkForce Center and Health and Human Services who provided information about the event. Juvenile offenders participated by assisting children with the activities and area organizations provided games, food, and prizes for the families that attended. The event was an opportunity for families to have fun, yet be in a safe and nurturing environment. This is an example of how Aitkin County provides its community members excellent programming and services by utilizing our talent, information, and community resources.

Outreach: The Employment and Training staff performs the following outreach in Aitkin County:

1. **Direct Contact:** Staff directly contacts school personnel, social workers, financial workers, juvenile diversion coordinators, and non-profits working with at-risk youth. Applications and information related to educational and training opportunities are provided.

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2. **Newsletters & Mailings:** Newsletters and other mailings are sent to worksite supervisors and social workers at Aitkin County Health and Human Services, juvenile diversion, teachers, businesses, parents, and students informing them of program successes and highlighting students who are doing exceptional work in our community. Additionally, information related to college, health, and nutrition are included in the newsletter.
3. **Community Outreach:** Counselors attend monthly Chamber of Commerce meetings, homeless coalition meetings, and C.A.R.E. (Coordinating Area Resources Effectively) to provide additional outreach to individuals, businesses, and agencies not directly working with youth, but who may have contact with youth.
4. **Comprehensive Follow-up:** Once a student is enrolled, a career counselor attends Individual Employment Plan (IEP) meetings to develop appropriate goals for the youth and to work as a team member in providing comprehensive services to the youth.
5. **Educational Presentations:** Presentations to groups of students, colleagues and community members are developed and implemented which provides a strong foundation for collaboration.
6. **Collaboration:** Youth staff partner with school personnel, social workers, representatives from the ministerial association, Chamber of Commerce and other professionals when working with families experiencing risk related issues.

Services: Provided to Young Offenders:

1. **Career Library:** Comprehensive career resources are available at the WorkForce Center. Additionally, NE MN Office of Job Training donates books to all three school districts annually.
2. **Current Labor Market information** The Aitkin Workforce Center provides current and future labor market information and promotes websites such as Northland Works (<http://www.thenorthlandworks.org/home.html>) which focuses on "Hot Jobs."
3. **Post Secondary Information:** The WorkForce Center provides catalogs of state, private, public, 2 year, 4 year colleges and universities.

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4. **Financial Aid Information:** Counselors assist individuals seeking information on financial aid, scholarships, loans, and grants.
5. **Access to Computers:** Youth may utilize the computers to research schools, complete homework, job search, write resumes, practice typing, etc.
6. **Job Board:** Job postings are updated daily outlining employment opportunities throughout Aitkin and surrounding counties.
7. **Workfirst Classes:** Youth may attend classes focusing on soft skills, job searching, math, reading, and computer skills, etc.
8. **Resume writing service** Available through resource room, group presentations, and one-on-one assistance.
9. **Assessment Inventories:** Career Scope is completed on enrolled youth to identify possible career interests, as well as additional assessments such as iseek, ABLE and others.
10. **On-site Interviews** Companies seeking individuals for work contact the WorkForce Center and staff makes phone calls, writes letters, and completes in-person contacts for recruitment.
11. **Employment Counselors:** Willing and able to assist individuals one-on-one with all their employment and training needs.
12. **Comprehensive Service:** Career counselors work with enrolled youth to coordinate services by attending IEP meetings and communicating with parents, guardians, school staff to provide comprehensive services focusing on success.
13. **Positive Work Habits:** Career Counselor administers a "Positive Work Habits survey two times a year to students enrolled in a work experience. Both the worksite supervisor and student complete the survey to determine what strengths the youth have and what work habits could be improved upon.
14. **Email Communication:** Career Counselors provide emails related to services available to collaborative partners.

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Referrals come from the following agencies/organizations:

- Court System
- School Districts
- Health and Human Services
- Nonprofits
- Community Organizations
- Parents and Family Members

Job Seeker Impact: Many youth involved in the juvenile diversion programs are lacking education, a good work history or strong life skills that are needed in order to be productive members of society. By enrolling and becoming actively involved in a youth employment program through the Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training, youth are provided with a comprehensive career planning service that provides support and education they need to become successful in the working world. Collaboration with other service providers provides a strong network of services that youth and their families can utilize. Youth thrive in environments where service providers take on a team approach to meet identified goals.

Community Impact: Students who are enrolled in the youth employment program through the Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training are encouraged to become active members in their community. Counselors identify opportunities in the community based upon interests and skills so that students can experience success out of their usual environments. Students learn new skills and passions that they may not have realized before. This enlightenment expands career choices and provides creative and positive outlets for the youth. Additionally, the community benefits from the service these talented youth provide.

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