

August 2015

**A Partnership for Unique and Meaningful Workforce Experience for Youth in Foster Care:
Wayne State University's Transition to Independence Program &
Detroit Employment Solutions' Summer Youth Employment Program**

Detroit Employment Solutions' Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) partners with businesses in Detroit to provide summer employment to youth who may not otherwise have the opportunity to gain meaningful workforce experience. Wayne State University (WSU) represents one of the over 200 businesses that participate in Detroit SYEP, and is one of only a few employment sites that specifically serves youth ages 16-21 with an open foster care case.

Wayne State University's (WSU) Transition to Independence Program (TIP) provides extra supports necessary for youth currently or formerly in the foster care system to access and graduate from college. As part of these efforts, TIP also coordinates WSU's summer youth employment, creating one-of-a-kind experiences for the youth in foster care at their site.

For three summers (2013-2015) WSU's TIP has coordinated the employment of approximately 15 youth in foster care for a total of 54 youth. The youth earn \$9-\$10 per hour during their seven-week summer employment program through TIP. At the beginning of the program, TIP staff members administer employment strengths assessments to the youth, and meet with each youth to discuss their career goals. The staff then utilize the assessment results and the expressed interests to place each youth with faculty/staff from 13 different colleges within WSU who best fit their skills and interests.

Focus on Trauma

Each year the TIP staff facilitate a specialized trauma-informed training for every faculty/staff who works with youth in foster care through the summer employment program. This training helps the faculty/staff to better understand some of the challenges facing the youth, and equips them with skills to handle sensitive situations. With knowledge from the specialized training, faculty/staff can appropriately handle situations if they arise. For example, a youth in foster care may have anxiety over an upcoming court visit, impacting his/her ability to concentrate at work. In a typical job that could result in the youth losing his/her job, but because of the specialized training, the youth will receive trauma-informed support and resources from their employer.

The Positive Impact

According to the Director of WSU's TIP, Dr. Angelique Day, MSW, PhD, "National statistics show that 70 percent of youth in foster care have an interest in attending college, but only 13 percent will go. Through this program we hope to empower the youth to realize they can pursue post-secondary education." By spending seven weeks working 20-25 hours/week on a college campus, youth in the foster care system start to feel comfortable in that setting, normalizing the college experience.

Through WSU's Summer Employment program, youth in foster care are able to gain meaningful employment experience when they might not otherwise have had the chance. Many youth get their first job through connections their parents or extended family may have or through adult support and encouragement filling out job applications and going to interviews. However, youth in foster care do not always have those people

to make connections for them and support them through the process of securing their first job. The skills gained through the summer employment program can help youth get employment later in life, and faculty/staff that the youth build relationships with can serve as references for employment or post-secondary education. This program gives youth in foster care the experience, skills, and relationships to overcome the obstacles they may face on their path to stable and meaningful long-term employment. Additionally, by employing youth in foster care in a college setting, the anticipated outcome is that the youth served by WSU's TIP will be more likely to go on to college; and this is part of the long-term evaluation of this program.

Funding for WSU's Summer Employment Program

Federal funding supports Youth in Transition programs through the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to provide programs/activities including education, financial management, housing, and employment assistance that help young people currently or formerly in the foster care system successfully transition to adulthood. Detroit Employment Solutions, a Michigan Works! Agency, provides a variety of youth employment opportunities year-round, including summer youth employment for youth in foster care supported by Youth in Transition funding from MDHHS.

No summer youth employment sites receive funding to support the placements. The WSU faculty/staff who supervise the young people in the program receive an employee to support their work, while the participating youth gain knowledge and skills in an area of their interest.

Policy Recommendations

Public policies should promote meaningful employment opportunities targeted specifically for youth who experience the most challenges in their lives, including but not limited to youth in foster care. The following policy recommendations could better support these types of programs.

1. Regardless of the stability of the young people involved, Youth in Transition only provides funding specifically for summer youth employment opportunities for former or current foster care youth through age 21. Michigan needs to expand Youth in Transition services to include individuals ages 21-24, and/or supplement this funding with federal or state workforce resources so young adults ages 21-24 can also have meaningful employment opportunities that will lead to long term employment stability.
2. Employment agencies should require training on trauma-informed practice of all employers working with youth who experience challenges. This training increases the odds that employers and employees will have positive interactions, and will build meaningful relationships and experiences for the youth while building more successful outcomes for the employment agencies and the young people themselves.
3. WSU's faculty/staff are able to participate in SYEP because of the support of the TIP program's expertise and staffing. Providing financial support for indirect costs of placement sites like WSU where additional training and supports may be needed (i.e. trauma training) could incentivize more employment sites to employ youth who are currently or who have been in foster care.

For more information about WSU's TIP Summer Employment Program, contact Dr. Angeliqe Day at (313) 577-4407 or via email at ew6080@wayne.edu.

If you would like to find out how your community can be profiled for your innovative work in any arena of child, youth and family services, contact Michigan's Children VP for Programs, Michele Corey at (517) 485-3500 or michele@michiganschildren.org.