

Stackable Credentials and Career Pathway Opportunities for TANF Participants

- 1) **For Minnesota FastTRAC, with the integrated instruction, what is the roll of the ABE instructor with the technical classes? Do the students already have a secondary degree (HS diploma or GED)?**

Minnesota FastTRAC: Some local partnerships required students to have GED/high school diploma but others do not. The ABE instructor in the technical class provides “just in time skill building” through a variety of team teaching methods – parallel instruction, complementary instruction, modeling note taking, etc.

- 2) **For Minnesota FastTRAC, who develops the curriculum and learning materials for the Bridge program?**

Minnesota FastTRAC: ABE programs are in collaboration with college technical instructors, employers, and workforce development professionals.

- 3) **You spoke of buy-in from community agencies related to "Navigator Services." Did they have incentive to assist FastTRAC participants? In the nursing example given, how much did the program cost per participant (or generalize to other training programs)?**

Minnesota FastTRAC: Navigators are specific to a career pathway program. Those participants are their responsibility.

- 4) **How can we see the career pathways for the six areas mentioned under Minnesota FastTRAC, i.e. courses in the bridge and integrated portions and certifications?**

Minnesota FastTRAC: Go to www.mnfasttrac.org. Click on the name of the pathway to get full list of courses, partners, and credentials.

- 5) **To any of the panelists, in terms of attendance for the program, what strategies did you use to keep the participants coming back and wanting to complete?**

Minnesota FastTRAC: We helped by mitigating the barriers, by having intrusive advising, through lots and lots of cheerleading. Our Navigator Services have been really a key to this. The Navigators are there in the classrooms weekly. They are on top of any potential type of issues that come up that make students stop attending. So they have been a key part of our strategy for keeping people engaged.

Parks Opportunity Program (POP): I can say for us it is a transitional jobs model so people are working in our program. They are paid for their work with us whether it is working on increasing their marketability or whether it is their actual work at the job site.

Non-compliance is grounds for progressive discipline and termination because it is a job. We are providing services for people - crucial services throughout their employment - but it is a job

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and they are paid for their time, so we definitely perform progressive discipline and, if necessary, we'll terminate non-compliant employees.

CATCH-HPOG Program: I think of 'student engagement' when I read this question. At the heart of attendance and retention is engagement. An engaged student will attend class and follow through. CATCH-HPOG has infused engagement strategies throughout its support services and training. I have bulleted examples below:

- We have a very involved recognition strategy that intentionally seeks out and rewards (in a fair way) persistence and determination, hard work, attendance, and many other essential student and worker success attributes that we want to see students enhance and develop. We find that students who are recognized for positive traits and actions are more likely to bond and engage with our program and thus want to participate.
- We also foster student-led study groups since we know that students who become important and valued by their classmates will also consistently attend and participate. The fact that our program uses a cohort model allows for this strategy.
- We closely monitor all attendance and address missed classes or missed assignments immediately. As a compressed program, a missed class creates an immediate barrier so we use Navigators to connect with absent students, assess needs, and provide resources if needed. Often childcare conflicts lead to absences.
- Finally, we promote student success stories heavily showing how the program has led to success for students not unlike themselves. Students who can formulate a vision of what's to come, what success looks like, are more likely, we find, to persist and participate.

6) For Heartland Human Care Services, how do you find employers for the transitional jobs and who pays the wages for these jobs?

Heartland Human Care Services: Transitional jobs wages are funded through our funder but we pay them directly so that we are the employer of record. We place participants at a work site for 12 weeks. We have also done that kind of in house model with some of our programs by partnering with external employers and utilizing a work crew model. This ensures the whole group is a cohort that starts and stops at one time, like at Greater Chicago Food Depository. They start and have the same 12 weeks together. The peer support piece has been a great part of the success of the program.

7) What is digital literacy?

Heartland Human Care Services: Digital literacy at a basic level is building skills and competencies related to using technology, computers, and the Internet. The way we approach digital literacy is really in the context of work, so that the digital literacy learning that's going on with the participants in our traditional jobs programs would be related to the ability to create an

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email account, write an email, copy text from a Microsoft Word document into the body of an email, attach a resume to an email, and complete an online job application.

We are really talking about the computer skills that are needed to obtain a job. What Nancy and I are really excited about developing further are computer skills that would help participants to retain a job as well. Of course, the skills that I just mentioned would do that. We are looking to continue to build our digital literacy curriculum.

CATCH-HPOG Program: For the CATCH-HPOG Program, digital literacy training is comprised of:

- Computer terminology;
- Computer and internet functionality;
- Computer and desktop organization;
- Creating files and folders;
- Saving files and folders;
- Basics of emailing and attaching documents in email;
- Using Dropbox;
- Microsoft Word basics;
- Introduction to laptops (a laptop is provided to each student);
- Navigating the college online learning platform;
- Navigating college resources online, especially library resources; and
- Launching college online courses.

- 8) **Do Parks Opportunity Program participants get paid for their training day? Also, is there a curriculum for the Parks Opportunity Program training days? If so, is it possible to get a copy of it?**

Parks Opportunity Program (POP): They are paid for the day that they spend in training and we have a variety of different types of workshops that all fall under the same curriculum that is used. Whoever is interested in doing that please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly and we will see what we could potentially share.

- 9) **Who, if any, of the other panelists has done work with refugees or limited English speaking professionals?**

Heartland Human Care Services: We do substantial work with refugees, providing literacy skills and preparing for careers in hospitality.

- 10) **What are some strategies you have used to get employers to "buy-in" to your programs?**

CATCH-HPOG Program: One of our main partners is the WIB, the local Workforce Investment Board. Our WIB staff our work source centers around Washington State. They have job developers as part of the local WIB in these workforce centers, so the job developers in partnership with our job development employment Navigator work closely to bring information about our CATCH program students and the curriculum. That is one aspect.

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Our local job developers are aware of our program, they are connected to our program and they are sharing information as they do outreach with employers, healthcare employers, about our students. But more importantly, I think, is that it is a community college training effort. In fact, in two community colleges, we have healthcare advisory panels that really drive the curriculum. The externship requirement that our students have is often the first in depth healthcare experience for many of our students. It is often the first opportunity they have to be employed. It is almost like a protracted interview when they do their externship.

Those externship experiences are connecting students to employers and connecting our students with employers' advisory panels that we have as part of our healthcare programs and the local Workforce Investment Board job developers working in concert with our on-site Navigators. These are the strategies that we are using.

11) With many TANF clients having criminal backgrounds, do you find it difficult to find job placements for participants?

Minnesota FastTRAC: Having workforce development in on initial assessment (of employability for specific pathway) is critical.

CATCH-HPOG Program: CATCH assesses all applicants to our program for disqualifying crimes. Not surprisingly, healthcare has an extensive list of disqualifying crimes. If someone does reveal such a crime, Navigators provide advising designed to assist that individual with exploring other fields and training opportunities. We also draw on the expertise of such organizations as *Conviction Careers* (<http://convictioncareers.org/>) as a resource for referrals.

12) What are some ways you measure soft skills?

CATCH-HPOG Program: CATCH-HPOG uses the Employment Readiness Scale (ERS) for pre- and post-measures of self-sufficiency and self-efficacy (<http://www.employmentreadiness.com/>). We also work with employers to identify the soft skills they expect and seek in employees. We share these expectations with students and work with students on completing online training modules related to these identified soft skill expectations. Students can list these training modules on their resumes as they apply for jobs. Our online training content is provided by Business Access (<http://www.business-access.com/ba/>).

13) How do you work on barriers to employment, such as driver's license, transportation, and child care?

Minnesota FastTRAC: Navigators have support service dollars and connections to many resources to help participants work through these issues.

Parks Opportunity Program (POP): With regards to driver's licenses, we do actually have training to help people get driver's licenses while they are here with us. Of course, they have to

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get their permit first and a lot of different things that are solely dependent on them before we can assist with driver training. But that is a component of our program that I did not mention during the presentation.

Of course, we are in New York City so that is not a major barrier. We have unbelievable public transportation. Our barriers come more in the form of child care. People may have child care because it is provided to them, but it may be difficulty to coordinate, for example they may have to drop off their children on three different subways before they come to work in the morning.

We do have supportive services where people on our staff are helping to coordinate with the trainee. We also have a great relationship with the city's Human Resources Administration where we work to make sure that there are no outstanding issues regarding the child care that is provided to them. Ultimately, it just involves case by case basis of sitting down with the person and brainstorming about the different ways that they can coordinate the resources that they do have to make sure that there is adequate coverage.

Occasionally, it can involve changing their work schedule but we try to be really careful with that. We try to make sure people know that it might happen here because it is a transitional job but having the flexibility to adjust their work schedule may not be an option in their next work site. So, we help them explore how they are looking at scheduling and their child care obligations as an overall component of their employability and what they can and cannot do with their next job.

14) Do you track what happens to participants who drop out of the program? Can someone reapply if they drop out?

Minnesota FastTRAC: Yes, we track participants through the workforce development database. I am not sure about the second answer. I would say that's a program by program choice.

CATCH-HPOG Program: CATCH Navigators track students who opt out of our program. We have five points for students to begin our program per year and it is our policy to check-in with all students who have opted out to re-assess their readiness. A high percentage of our students that have dropped out do return. The majority who do leave do so for significant personal issues that once addressed, are encouraged to continue with the program from the point at which they left. We re-assess their readiness, discuss what has changed to improve their situation, provide supports if needed, and re-admit.

As part of the HPOG system, there is a relatively new data management system. We enter all students into the system which allows us to have the basic information on all of our students. So, we maintain contact with a student who does drop out because they remain in our system. We push out information on a quarterly basis to students who have not completed our program.

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We also advertise other community college resources to them. We realize that healthcare, the hybrid nature of our program, or the compressed nature of our program may not be a fit, but there are a myriad of other community college resources and programs that could support that student. It is important to the college, both colleges, that we maintain contact with all students in our program who applied to our program, including those who didn't finish.

What we do find almost without fail, is that any student who steps out of our program wants desperately to come back in and they typically stepped out because of a very serious issue in their life. We work with them on identifying a date to reenter and then identify stair steps leading up to that date -- some check in points like if they are following up on what they need to, if they are addressing their challenge, and how they are addressing it.

We work very intentionally to bring students back into the program unless it was very clear the student did not fit with the program. Then, we refer them to other campus resources.

15) Do you partner with any employers that are familiar with and support your program(s) and commit to hiring participants and graduates?

CATCH-HPOG Program: In healthcare training, clinical externships are an important and required component and often become a form of protracted job interview for a high percentage of our students. Because we couple healthcare training with three months of foundational skill development (life skills, college success skills, computer skills, job and career management skills, and healthcare fundamentals), we find that our students are well positioned for externship success and, consequently, for employment as well.

16) Do you work with participants with a criminal record?

Minnesota FastTRAC: Yes.

Heartland Human Care Services: Yes, our entire current transitional job program is specific to persons who have a criminal conviction in their background. We have other programs as well with people with old and new convictions.

CATCH-HPOG Program: At least one-third, maybe more, of our applicants have significant criminal issues in their background. As I mentioned, if it is of a disqualifying nature, we work with them on looking into other education training opportunities here at the college.

Within healthcare and high-tech to high-touch continuum of healthcare, there could still be some areas that would qualify for that individual based on their background. We explore that as well. We have our Navigators who are experienced in referring those individuals with disqualifying crimes to resources in the community that specifically work with individuals with a certain background to explore other options.

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17) You mentioned some strong level gains for a 12 week class. How many hours per week are your classes?

Heartland Human Care Services: The classes are two hours per week. They are also using and practicing the literacy and numeracy skills during the week at work. We feel that many of our students are gaining confidence and refreshing a lot of dormant skills which helps in the gains.

18) Do you have problems getting Post-TABE data? Is there an incentive you use for participants to follow-up with?

Heartland Human Care Services: We post-TABE during the last week of employment so that the students are still employees and receiving a paycheck while post-TABE testing.