

Capital Workforce Partners **Helping Low Wage Workers Build Skills, Advance Careers, and Increase Incomes**

Capital Workforce Partners' LIFE– Low Income Families Employment – Program has helped low wage workers improve their circumstances since July 2007. Participants receive help selecting a career, setting goals, and acquiring the skills needed to move into self-sustaining occupations with career potential.

Program participants are already employed, perhaps working part-time, perhaps working multiple jobs, but all having difficulty making ends meet. They are referred to the program by social service agencies (such as energy assistance programs, volunteer income tax assistance (VITA) sites, and food pantries) or local chambers of commerce. Outreach is important, since low-wage workers may be busy working two or three jobs, and do not typically come into a one-stop center.

Once enrolled, participants take a career assessment covering interests, aptitudes, and educational level. Programming is offered in the allied health, advanced manufacturing, or green energy fields. Participants work with their employment coach to set goals and design a personal development plan. They are enrolled in WIA, which funds their education and training programs, and they have access to social and financial services as needed.

Employment coaches are the linchpin of the program. Coaches have a caseload of only 50 participants, which ensures that they are able to provide each participant with personalized attention. The coaches also bring their clients together for group workshops and mutual support, covering such topics as life and work balance, financial planning, and job search strategies.

Operating the program are multiple partners, including chambers of commerce, community colleges, and social service agencies, which not only provide necessary services, but meet as a group to discuss individual participant's challenges and jointly develop solutions.

The program is operating in four municipalities, each of which has its own unique aspects. All of the sites use WIA funding, but depending on the site, some also use dollars from the State Office of Workforce Competitiveness, state pilot grant funding, municipal funding, or foundation funding.

The chambers of commerce play a major role, and depending on location, may provide links to job opportunities, workshops, and actual chamber membership, which helps the participants acquire a "professional polish" and network with potential employers.

To date, 116 individuals have been enrolled in LIFE, most of whom are in their early to mid 30s, and 60 percent of whom are women. Fifty-five percent of participants have received an individual training account (ITA). Of the program's 116 participants, 44 have achieved a credential, and 40 have obtained new employment with higher wages, benefits, or both. The remaining 76 are still in the program. The program's cost per participant, including outreach, recruitment, case management, training, placement, and follow-up, is \$6,100.

Capital Workforce Partners sees the LIFE program as a model it would like to roll out to its larger WIA population, helping those participants advance in their jobs beyond their initial placements. LIFE has really allowed them to make a difference in the lives of the low income working population.

Capital Workforce Partners suggests that WIBs that want to replicate the program should start small; identify and bring together key partners from business, social services, and education and training; and avoid getting underway right before the biggest recession since WWII hits your region.

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