



What Is a WorkForce Center?

Information for Minnesota Families of Youth with Disabilities

Introduction

WorkForce Centers help people develop skills, look for work, keep jobs, and build careers. When the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) passed in 2014, it placed an increased emphasis on employment programs for youth with disabilities. This handout helps families of youth with disabilities learn more about employment services they may be able to access through their local WorkForce Center.

What are WorkForce Centers?

The American Job Center system is a WIOA-funded network of local centers in each state. In Minnesota, these centers are known as WorkForce Centers. The services for both job seekers and employers differ from center to center, based on local needs. Often, other community programs such as vocational rehabilitation, unemployment insurance, and adult basic education are also located at, or hold activities in partnership with, WorkForce Centers.

What types of services do WorkForce Centers provide?

WorkForce Centers provide job training, education, and employment services at a single neighborhood location.

Youth programs serve out-of-school youth between the ages of 16 and 24, and in-school youth between the ages of 14 and 21. The programs focus on helping youth complete high school and gain post-secondary credentials that lead to good paying jobs. Various programs fund different services that include helping eligible youth:

- Develop basic skills
- Get a summer job
- Work in construction or other trades
- Develop their decision-making, problem-solving, and negotiating skills
- Receive year-round competitive integrated employment and training

Core services are available to all adults 18 years and older. Core services include:

- Job search and placement assistance
- Labor market information
- Initial assessment of skills and needs
- Information about available services
- Adult basic education
- Follow-up services to retain jobs

Intensive services are available for people who are unable to find jobs through core services alone, or who meet additional eligibility criteria. Having a disability is one factor that is considered when determining access to intensive services such as training, individual assistance, and case management.

Specific services vary by WorkForce Center location.

Who is eligible to receive services from WorkForce Centers?

Every individual, including a person with a disability, can access “core services.”

Youth programs have a priority to serve youth who face multiple barriers to employment. Having a disability is considered to be a barrier. Other risk factors include lack of basic skills, involvement in the juvenile justice system, or placement in foster care.

Some services also have income eligibility criteria. However, for youth with a disability, only their individual income, *not* their family’s, is considered. Youth who meet the income eligibility criteria for receiving cash payments under any federal, state, or local public assistance program (such as Social Security Disability Income [SSDI]; Supplemental Security Income [SSI]; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP]; or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]) are eligible for youth services.

What specific services may be available for transition-age youth with disabilities?

Minnesota WorkForce Centers can provide any youth with a basic level of assistance, including:

- Information on training and education options in the local area
- Information and access to early work experiences such as internships, apprenticeships, mentor programs, cooperative education programs, and summer work programs
- Job listings, help with resume writing, and developing interview skills
- Job search assistance
- Referral to other agencies

Youth and young adults with disabilities will also likely be eligible to receive expanded services such as:

- Career exploration and guidance
- Help graduating from high school or obtaining a General Education Diploma (GED)
- Access to training for in-demand industries and occupations
- Post-secondary enrollment
- Support finding a job in that pathway

WorkForce Centers must offer the following WIOA youth program activities; some services may be provided directly at the WorkForce Center, while others may be provided by partner organizations. Specific services provided to youth are based on individual assessments and goals. Not every youth will need each of these services:

- Tutoring, study skills training, and dropout recovery and prevention
- Alternative high school services
- Paid and unpaid work experience (such as internships, job shadowing, or summer employment)
- Occupational skill training (including apprentice and certificate programs)
- Education related to workforce preparation activities and training
- Leadership development activities (including volunteering, peer mentoring, and life skills training)
- Supportive services (including school fees, child care, transportation, and other work costs needed for youth to participate in WIOA program activities)
- Adult mentoring for at least 12 months

- Follow-up services for not less than 12 months as appropriate (including case management, support services, or regular contact)
- Comprehensive guidance and counseling (including for mental health, career, education, or drug and alcohol)
- Financial literacy education
- Entrepreneurial skills training
- Labor market and employment information on in-demand occupations and industries
- Activities helping youth prepare for and transition to post-secondary education and training

When needed, youth with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations that are necessary to use any WorkForce Center services.

Additionally, all Minnesota WorkForce Centers offer youth services funded by sources other than WIOA, which provide them with additional program options. Because the services offered can vary by location, the best way to determine whether youth are eligible for particular programs is for families to connect with their local WorkForce Center: mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/workforce-centers/workforce-center-locations.

What is the role of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency?

Individuals with disabilities who may need more extensive vocational rehabilitation (VR) services can apply for them at the WorkForce Center. Youth whose disability results in multiple “functional limitations” and significantly impacts their ability to work may be eligible for VR services. In many locations, vocational rehabilitation staff are located on-site at WorkForce Centers.

Vocational rehabilitation agencies now have an increased emphasis on assisting youth with disabilities before they leave high school. Newly required VR services, called “Pre-Employment Transition Services” or “Pre-ETS,” are being provided statewide to students in grade 9 through age 21 by contracts with local providers, including some WorkForce Centers. To access Pre-ETS, families can ask their student’s high school special education case manager for a referral to the local Pre-ETS provider, or directly apply for vocational rehabilitation services. Pre-ETS include:

- Career exploration and guidance
- Work-based learning such as job shadowing or internships
- Counseling on post-secondary education opportunities
- Workplace readiness training
- Training on self-advocacy

You can also learn more about other VR services for transition-age young adults at mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities

What are other service providers located within the WorkForce Centers?

In addition to WIOA youth programs and vocational rehabilitation services, other state and federal programs are partners in the WorkForce Center system, and may also be located at WorkForce Centers. All partners provide services that can benefit eligible people with disabilities. These programs include:

- “One-stop” employment office that provides re-employment services for adults
- State unemployment insurance programs
- Adult education and literacy programs
- Post-secondary vocational education
- Welfare-to-work programs
- Veterans employment and training programs

How do I start?

Visit your nearest WorkForce Center or call to make an appointment with a youth counselor. You can find yours at mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/workforce-centers/workforce-center-locations. Tell the person you speak to that your son or daughter would like to sit down with someone to fill out an application for individualized services. Once eligibility is confirmed, a youth case manager will assess your son or daughter's needs and develop an Individualized Service Strategy (ISS) that outlines services that match his or her strengths, interests, employment goals, and support needs.

Additional resources

The following websites provide additional information about workforce services for youth and young adults with disabilities:

PACER Center's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment

PACER.org/transition

PACER's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment (NPCTE) website contains valuable information on a variety of topics related to transition and employment for youth with disabilities.

952-838-9000; Toll-free: (800) 537-2237; transition@PACER.org

Find an American Job Center

careeronestop.org/LocalHelp/local-help.aspx

Find the nearest Workforce Center anywhere in the country and locate other valuable government services.

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)

- DEED's Office of Youth Development: mn.gov/deed/programs-services/office-youth-development
- WIOA Young Adult Program: mn.gov/deed/assets/wioa-youth-factsheet_tcm1045-270156.pdf
- Minnesota Youth Program: mn.gov/deed/assets/myp-fact-sheet_tcm1045-134258.pdf
- Minnesota's Partners for Youth Career Pathways Disability Employment Initiative: mn.gov/deed/programs-services/office-youth-development/special/disability-employment-initiative