

Making the Match: Aligning Work Experiences with Interests and Skills

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The Promoting the Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE) project is a 5-year, two-group, randomized controlled trial funded by the U.S. Department of Education in October 2013. Six sites were awarded funding to test the effectiveness of a multicomponent experimental intervention for improving academic, career, and financial outcomes for youth with disabilities receiving supplemental security income (SSI) benefits and their families. Awardees include Arkansas, ASPIRE (a consortium of six western states), California, Maryland, New York, and Wisconsin.

Overview

The best way to learn about work is to work. Work experience while in school is identified as a key factor in post-school employment success for youth with disabilities (Mamun et al. 2017; Test et al. 2009; Wehman et al. 2014). Maryland PROMISE incorporated work experiences—an intervention component required for all PROMISE sites—to promote positive changes in education and employment outcomes for youth SSI recipients.

MD PROMISE implemented a planned, personalized approach to develop multiple work experiences for youth, using an asset-based inventory called a Positive Personal Profile (PPP). This inventory profiled the youths' interests, preferences and career goals.

The information was then used by the MD PROMISE core intervention team (employment specialist and case manager) to inform and tailor the job search process to fit the needs and interests of the youth. This tool not only allowed youth to gain quality individualized, integrated work experiences, but it expanded career awareness related to their expressed career goals.

Youth-driven Work Experiences

The team worked with youth to explore their interests, skills, and support needs. Targeted conversations with the youth, their family members, teachers, and other significant people in their lives, coupled with observation of the youth engaging in school and community-based activities, informed the development of this comprehensive youth profile. Youth inventories, like the PPP, can offer a robust snapshot of the youth and identify potential career connections for exploration and aid in the development of short- and long-term work experiences.

As summarized in Table 1, 87% of the 997 youth enrolled in MD PROMISE program services across five regions had a PPP and 82% had work experiences. See Table 1.

For more information on MD PROMISE visit:
www.mdtransition.org

Table 1: Maryland PROMISE Work Experiences

Region	# of youth enrolled	% with PPP	# of youth with work experiences	% of youth with work experiences
Baltimore City	233	83%	194	83%
Eastern	150	91%	122	81%
Northern	194	90%	166	86%
Southern	158	84%	119	75%
Western	262	87%	213	81%
Total	997	87%	814	82%

Matching Youth Interests and Skills to Work Experiences

Staff were expected to utilize the PPP to develop and align work experiences to youths’ interests and career goals. An examination was conducted to determine how well the work experiences aligned with the identified interests and career goals expressed in youth PPPs. As outlined in Table 2, of the 814 MD PROMISE youth who participated in work experiences, 64% of those were directly tied to their career interests as identified on the PPP youth inventory profile.

experience doing cell phone repair and screen replacement, while yet another youth completed a work experience in unarmed security based on his interest in law enforcement.

As is the case for all teenagers, MD PROMISE youth expressed a wide range of interests with some possessing very clearly defined career goals, while others presented with little to no direction. (See examples on the next page.) Staff provided all youth with the opportunity to explore their interests by experiencing different

Table 2: Maryland PROMISE Positive Personal Profile (PPP) Aligned Work Experiences

Maryland PROMISE PPP Alignment	# PROMISE Youth with Work Experiences	# PROMISE Youth with PPP Aligned Work Experiences	% PROMISE Youth with PPP Aligned Work Experiences
Maryland PROMISE Youth	814	521	64%

These targeted work experiences can have meaningful impact on the youths’ career decisions. Some examples of career interests identified on the youths’ PPPs included: arts, automotive, childcare, computer technology, legal, medical, military, and sports. Driven by the PPP, relevant opportunities were developed. For example, a youth interested in art was able to participate in a work experience pre-drawing canvases and preparing materials for an art studio. Another youth, interested in computer technology, was matched with a work

work tasks and environments. Using the PPP as a guide allowed youth to gain work experiences with targeted employers and to further explore and develop their career interests and skills.

Conclusion

Youth with disabilities who have personalized work experiences in community-based, integrated settings can apply these experiences to inform their career decision making. A planning tool that takes inventory of youth

interests and skills, such as the Positive Personal Profile (PPP), can be used to individualize work experience development, which can in turn drive the job search. Interest-driven youth work experiences allow youth to increase their career awareness and skill development, as well as participate more meaningfully in discussions about their post-school goals. Learning about work by working has the potential to improve youth’s long-term employment success.

References

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Snapshot of Youth Driven Work Experiences

Youth with Clear Career Interests	Youth with No Clear Career Interests	Youth with Multiple Career Interests
<p>PPP Interests: Chris expressed an interest in electricity and engineering.</p> <p>Work Experience: Electrician’s assistant helping with electric car charging station installation</p> <p>Work Experience Learning: He was able to get hands-on experience working in the field getting exposure to customers and the technical skills application needed for electrical work. The supervisor was able to give Chris real-time feedback and mentor him in how to communicate with customers and share the necessary skill development and education needed for next steps in building a career as an electrician.</p>	<p>PPP Interests: Sean did not know what job he wanted however he was interested in technology. He could take apart computers and put them back together. Sean explored computer-related opportunities. Because of Sean’s limited communication skills, a working interview allowed him to demonstrate his computer skills and ability to install software and respond to requested computer repair needs.</p> <p>Work Experience: Cell phone repair, software updates, and IT trouble shooting</p> <p>Work Experience Learning: Sean developed a repertoire of computer repair skills and clarity about his career interest and goals.</p>	<p>PPP Interests: Jasmine expressed interest in graphic arts and working with kids.</p> <p>Work Experience: Photography studio assistant setting up family portraits</p> <p>Work Experience Learning: Jasmine not only had the opportunity to shadow a professional photographer, she learned about the studio side of the job including photo composition, equipment set up and take down, and customer service.</p>