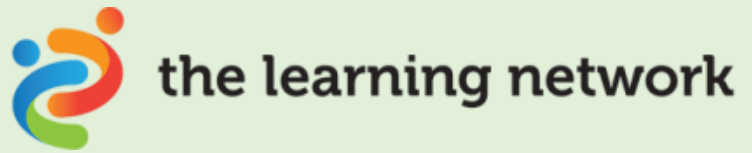


Life-long Learning Initiative



Ramsey County's new way of delivering participant-centered MFIP employment services informed by adult executive skill development.

Published November 2016

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The Initial Paradigm Shift

In early 2013, Ramsey County, wanted to find a way to improve MFIP employment services and noted an absence of research demonstrating that the very limited number of recognized MFIP work activities correlated with strong employment outcomes. Using evidence informed platforms, Ramsey County focused on participant agency, choice, and pairing the MFIP work activities more closely with coaching, education (especially GED or high school diploma), certificate and credential building, mentoring, and retention services. Ramsey County believed that the effectiveness of employment services would increase and move more people from welfare to work. This focus was implemented beginning in 2014. As the implementation deepened, the concept of 4E's - Engagement, Education, Employment, and Employment Retention – as success indicators developed.

The Advent of the Lifelong Learning Initiative

During the above mentioned shift, knowledge about brain science, and the awareness that toxic stress has a significant impact on participant decision making and self-determination, merged into county planning. This gave rise to the idea for a new employment services intervention. The intervention, referred to as the Life-long Learning Initiative (LLI), is a participant-centered program that builds essential (executive) functioning skills, enhanced (executive skills specific) coaching and motivational interviewing to create and meet employment goals. The county believes that increasing the engagement of participants in their goal-setting process and focusing on areas where participants already have strengths, participants' success, as measured by the Self-Support Index, will increase. In this process, the relationship between the county worker and the participant shifts from one of case management to one that is "person-centered, goal-driven and relationship-based."

Theory of Change behind the Life-long Learning Initiative



Key Characteristics of the Life-long Learning Initiative

Starts with the participant at the center: In LLI the participant is viewed as the leading force because they are the expert on their own life. Additionally, the program is set up for the participant to achieve self-discovery of strengths and recognizes participant successes. Goals are set by the participant, with guidance from the counselor.

Based on brain science: Ramsey County has learned that living in poverty during childhood can negatively impact the development of executive skills and this can last into adulthood. However, the county has also learned that adults are capable of building these skills and everyone, regardless of income or circumstances, have strengths and weaknesses. The approach that Ramsey County has taken is two-fold: 1. Assist the participant to find ways of reducing stress in their lives and find ways of reducing stress in our program environment or delivery, and 2. Work with the participant to build and strengthen their executive skills. The ultimate goal is to end the participant's entrapment in the cycle of poverty by

increasing his or her ability to set short, measurable, and achievable goals related to long-term education and employment gains. Recent research has shown the importance of executive functioning skills, defined as “self-regulation to achieve goals.” In LLI the participant identifies their executive skill strengths, and may choose, as part of goal work, to utilize those strengths to build and achieve goals. Additionally, knowledge of what strengths the participant has can guide what types of employment the participant seeks. The twelve executive functioning skills fall into three categories: how one organizes things; how one reacts to situations; and, how one gets things done.

Enhanced coaching: In LLI the counselor/coach helps the participant use their strengths and avoid limitations. The coach assists them to use their power to set and achieve their goals. The coach helps the person identify dreams, set goals (long-term, short-term or daily), enhance executive skill and make strides toward and achieve their goals.

Motivational Interviewing: Coaching and Motivational Interviewing are service mainstays in Ramsey County MFIP. So too does LLI use coaching and the evidence based practice of Motivational Interviewing (MI) to help participants identify and reach their goals. MI helps elicit and strengthen the participant’s existing internal motivation to change. The coach brings the “spirit” of MI, evocation, acceptance, partnership and compassion, to the conversation.

Piloting the Lifelong Learning Initiative in Ramsey County

Ramsey County piloted this intervention in the first half of 2016 in a small group of counselors and participants. The program was expanded in September to include approximately 18 staff at two of the six employment service agencies. The LLI tools are used with newly enrolled participants and are being rolled out to existing participants.

The intervention is now a philosophy by which services are being delivered in two Employment Services agencies, progress has been carefully measured and studied by the county and Mathematica. Several Minnesota counties have inquired about Life-long Learning. Ramsey County is pleased to share information and support to those counties considering providing this approach to their local MFIP participants.

More on the program...

12 Executive Functioning Skills:

These skills are the focus of LLI. Finding those that the participant excels in helps to focus and direct their goals.

1. Stress tolerance
2. Organization
3. Time management
4. Goal-directed persistence
5. Metacognition
6. Response inhibition
7. Working memory
8. Emotional Control
9. Flexibility
10. Sustained Attention
11. Task Initiation
12. Planning and prioritizing

Characteristics of Successful Coaches:

This new program requires different skills on the part of the county worker than other MFIP programs

1. Enjoy working w/ participants & naturally relate
2. Empathetic and excellent listeners
3. Reliable, organized and have adequate planning skills
4. Comfortable w/ participant taking the lead and holding the power in the goal setting process
5. Collaboration—rely more on questions than directions/teaching

Motivational Interviewing Processes:

The steps of increasing participant resolve to change

1. Engaging – creating a trusting relationship between the coach and participant
2. Focusing – helping the participant pick a specific goal *they* hold
3. Evoking – helping the participant find their reasons for wanting to make the changes and meet the goal
4. Planning – helping the participant set concrete steps they will take to meet their chosen goal

Assumptions of the Program about Goal Setting and Motivation:

1. Participants set goals because they want to change and improve their lives
2. The participant accepts that the goal will require effort because they don't think the goal is going to be achieved by accident or 'luck'
3. Motivation is essential for behavior change and maintenance of effort to occur
4. Goals are a source of motivation if they are chosen by the person and if the person believes that the goal is realistically achievable

For more information on the Lifetime Learning Initiative contact Who would you like as the contact for questions?

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