

# MMI Proactive Grant Program: Workforce Development

*Approved by the MMI Committee on March 6, 2023*

*Approved by Daughters of Charity Ministries, Inc. on March 9, 2023*

The Daughters of Charity 2022 General Assembly and their Provincial Plan for 2021-2027, speaks to the theme of human rights and holistic development for those most abandoned in society. Addressing societal problems at a systemic level requires changing deeply embedded structures that create and reinforce injustice and exclusion. Responding to this in November of 2022, Daughters of Charity Ministries, Inc. designated Workforce Development as a Proactive Grant Focus Area to be researched, explored, and implemented through Mission & Ministry Impact (MMI).

Immediately following the designation, MMI created a Workforce Development Resource Group consisting of three members of the MMI Committee (Sister Mary Bader, Dave Schopp, and F. Dale Whitten); Mary Wildeman, MMI Director; and Cheri Tillis, Chief Executive Officer of Fathers & Family Support Center, St. Louis. The Resource Group is supported by the MMI staff. A Workforce Development content expert with broad and deep experience in workforce development will also provide guidance to the WDRG. The WDRG has reviewed multiple research articles, profiled 19 workforce development/job training organizations, and conducted in-depth interviews with 7 of those organizations resulting in the identification of key program characteristics and potential grant outcomes described below.

The WDRG defines Workforce Development as activities that move people from poverty into living wage employment. Within this context, Workforce Development programs are comprehensive, providing integrated work/life skills and occupational skills training with long-term wrap around support services. Workforce Development aims to give job seekers the necessary education and support to obtain employment through relationships with employers where labor shortages exist. It incorporates systemic change by identifying and addressing the barriers which prevent people from earning a living wage.

## Citing the Need

Underserved (unemployed and underemployed) adults do not have the luxury of time, flexibility, and financial resources for lengthy educational programs to improve their outcomes. They need accelerated forms of learning that allow them to improve basic skills, obtain their secondary credential, and gain occupational skills that will help them earn family-sustaining wages. The unique challenges these adults face related to poverty and other barriers also call for a more supportive and comprehensive approach to workforce development that will allow participants to fulfill their potential as employees in the modern workplace.<sup>1</sup>

While the national unemployment rate is historically low at 3.7%, areas within the Province of St. Louise, show somewhat higher rates in communities where the Daughters' serve. What these low unemployment rates do not show is that many individuals are still living in poverty due to the low wages paid by their unskilled jobs. Additionally, many communities have pockets of individuals living in poverty which have very high unemployment rates often of minority populations that are masked by the overall unemployment rates.

From an employer perspective, almost 40% of American employers say they cannot find people with entry level job skills, while 60% complain of lack of preparation even for entry level jobs and nearly 40% of U.S. adults have below a basic level of English literacy, and nearly as many have not yet acquired the digital literacy required for today's good jobs.<sup>1</sup>

Among other populations showing significantly higher unemployment rates, formerly Incarcerated Persons (FIPs) have a total unemployment rate of over 27%. After three years, FIPs with employment only have a 16% recidivism rate, compared to 52% of unemployed FIPs. The unemployment rate for FIPs is 5x higher than non-FIPs. Looking at the number of people affected, 64% of unemployed men in their 30s have a criminal record.<sup>2</sup> Older youth and young adults (ages 16-24) have the highest national unemployment rate by age group at 8.5%.<sup>3</sup>

Combined, these factors provide an opportunity for this proactive grant program to have a significant impact on those living in poverty.

### Research Findings

Workforce development programs are transformative. Stable, well-paying jobs provide resources for investment in lifelong success, in community development, and in future generations. Research has shown that collaboration, commitment, communication, recognition that place matters, and objective evaluation are all important ingredients in designing and maintaining effective workplace development initiatives that help individuals and communities prosper economically.<sup>4</sup> It further identifies that an important challenge to developing the workforce is the lack of critical support services, like transportation, needed by those seeking training. These services are either inaccessible or underfunded, especially for those people living in low- and moderate-income communities. Training needs to be connected to support that enables people to access the training, and then once they complete the training, to be able to take advantage of job opportunities and to move along a career path.<sup>4</sup>

Other research shows that exemplary workforce development providers use labor market data and job projections to tailor training to growing industries and eliminate less relevant programs. Successful programs study trends in the job market, often by discussions with local business, to determine which fields are growing and then adjust their efforts accordingly.<sup>5</sup> WDRG's own research supports these findings. The profiles of successful workforce development organizations and the in-depth interviews mentioned above also highlight support services and labor market research as key to a successful program.

### Key Workforce Development Program Characteristics

MMI Workforce Development Grants will be awarded to organizations which provide or seek to develop these practices:

- Life-skills: interpersonal relationship skills; conflict resolution; coping with stress and emotions; active listening; public speaking; presentation skills; written and verbal communication; time management; and financial literacy, etc.
- Job-readiness training: resume writing, job interviews, remedial education/tutoring in basic English, math and digital literacy; etc.
- Case management: assess the needs and barriers of the participant to be successful in the workforce development program by maintaining contact from application through alumni services by providing resources and referrals to services, etc.
- Wrap around services: mental health or addiction counseling; ID assistance; locating or paying for childcare; and subsidized transportation (free or reduced bus or subway fare), etc.
- Hard skills/technical-training programs: health care, childcare, hospitality, landscaping, food service, medical billing/coding, housekeeping, etc.
- Industry-recognized certifications
- Job placement services
- Paid work experience through internships or on-the-job training
- Promote job retention and career advancement
- Strong Alumni/Aftercare services: provide access to case management, additional education and/or services

- Partnerships with employers that are committed to providing family-sustaining wages and benefits
- Strong data management system
- Holistic/Person-centered approach (building relationships and responding to the needs of the individual person)
- Trauma informed care strategies utilized to address participants barriers to success

#### Measuring the Impact of MMI's Proactive Grant Program: Workforce Development

Workforce Development organizations receiving grants from MMI will provide individuals with the necessary skills, services, and knowledge to earn a living wage in order to plan for the future and participate in the local economy.

The MMI Proactive Grant Program: Workforce Development will assist organizations interested in addressing one or more of the following outcomes:

- Increase Capacity: Expand current programming capacity to help more low-income, unemployed, and underemployed job seekers secure employment that pays a family-sustaining wage
- Increase Retention: Recruitment to program completion
- Additional Job Training Tracks: Adding new programming based on current labor market research and community/employer needs
- Improve Alumni/Aftercare: increase graduate services and data collection in Alumni and Aftercare programming
- Replicate: Expand into other communities/locations

In collaboration with the funded organizations, specific measures will be defined for the applicable outcome categories. The outcome data will be collected every six months during regular reporting requirements and the resulting impact made by the MMI Proactive Grant Program: Workforce Development will be reported to the MMI Committee, DCM and Daughters of Charity.

Through responsive grantmaking, MMI will continue to fund workforce development projects through the Mission Grant Program.

***Workforce Development Resource Group Report***  
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**WORKS CITED**

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