

UTEC (United Teen Equality Center)

Currently, young people scheduled for an average of 26 hours a week of WFD and GED classes. Between work, GED, substance abuse counseling, and other individual wraparound services that young people receive, little time exists to address some of the needs uncovered in the RMYF-funded evaluation, and to further capitalize on the strong support that our youth identified in their relationships with UTEC case workers.

In response to the challenge, we are developing an entry level to the WFD program known as Transformational Beginnings. This entry phase will include a formal therapeutic component that allows young people to explore their pasts and plan for their future, financial literacy, and career exploration. The first level is intended to lay the foundation for ongoing conversation and reflection among young people for as long as they are at UTEC.

Knowing that youth in our target population need more than personal exploration to remain engaged, we will include a paid work component, but it will not be as time intensive or skills-focused as current levels of WFD. Youth will work no more than 10 hours a week in roles that focus on manual labor and require limited training, making it ideal for youth who need to develop consistency and attendance before focusing on more specific job-training skills in our current WFD crews (food services and building trades).

During Transformational Beginnings, the youths' schedule (still based on an average of 26 hours of programming) will instead focus on stabilization, clinical needs, and life skills like financial literacy. Additional soft skills trainings will begin during Transformational Beginnings and continue through the next WFD tiers.

This new level of the WFD program requires staffing separate from the existing WFD program, and the core competencies for staff will align more closely with those of the caseworkers in our Transitional Coach program. With RMYF support, we will hire a Transformations Coordinator who is in charge of developing and implementing Transformational Beginnings' therapeutic and education components and oversees the limited work components.

Essentially, the Coordinator is responsible for all incoming target youth's programmatic experience and will manage their activities from 9 to 2 every day. The existing structure of WFD will remain the same, but it will be known as an advanced stage of the program. Individual youth will be paired with a dedicated Transitional Coach (case worker) when they transition from Transformational Beginnings to the existing WFD level and work on a more structured work crew in the culinary arts or building trades.

Young people may remain at the Transformational Beginnings level for as little as a month to as many as 6-12 months, depending on their progress on personal barriers and soft skills development. To progress to WFD, youth must demonstrate increased financial literacy, begin a process of career exploration, and demonstrate that they can come to work consistently and on time. (Specific benchmarks and measurements are still to be determined.)