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All of the students below entered the Heartland Works'/Topeka Public School's WIA Funded Youth Program with barriers to employment. This WIA youth program addresses the disparities students with barriers to employment face in a way in which no other program does.

Unfortunately, for students with disabilities, the inequities continue to widen rapidly. Without such a program, these students would be left behind. Most of these students would have qualified for disability and many other welfare and housing programs. Instead, they are in gainful employment. Almost all of our students have more than one barrier to employment.

Helena

Helena grew up without a mother. She lived with her father in a poor section of Topeka. Helena was a very beautiful girl and when you looked at her you could never tell she had a disability that almost kept her from graduating from high school. She would study long and hard and did not want to disappoint her father or her teachers who had helped her so much. But secretly, even Helena wondered if she would graduate. It wasn't until Helena entered the WIA school-to-work youth program at Stormont Vail that she realized that despite her learning disability she was able to do so many things that she just didn't think possible. For instance, Helena knew she could barely add 10 +10 without the embarrassment of a calculator, but when she worked in the nutritional services department she learned she could work a cash register faster than half the employees! Helena also worked in the breast feeding clinic at Stormont and realized how well she related to children and their families. Subsequently, Helena was hired because of her skills at a local retail sales outlet as a cashier and worked there for several years before obtaining her child care certification. She now owns her own a licensed daycare center here in Topeka since 2002. Helena also has three children of her own and does not utilize any kind of state assistance.

Christina

Christina grew up in a poor neighborhood in Topeka. She was court ordered to live with her father, who was secretly addicted to drugs, from the time she was 6. He was and still is a member of narcotics anonymous. The house she grew up in does not even exist now as it was condemned by the city. Her mother was a drug addict and a nude dancer at a bar in North Topeka. Christina dropped out of school in her junior year. Christina was a member of Big Brothers and Big Sisters and had a big sister who encouraged her to get into the WIA Youth program at Stormont Vail. She did and she worked in the lab next to several doctors who thought that Christina was an awesome young lady and encouraged her to go back to school and or to get her GED. While in the lab, Christina sat next to the doctors as they dissected body parts and identified cancer cells. Because of Christina's amazing experience, she went on to get her GED, enrolled in nursing school, got married, had a baby and has now worked at Stormont Vail on the cancer floor from 7 pm to 7am for the last 3 years. Christina will finish her RN nursing school in 1 year.

Brad

Brad grew up with his mother and two brothers. He never knew his father. He grew up in what we call the inner city. At the age of 12, Brad became familiar with gangs. He dropped out of school before he got kicked out. Brad had a friend who was in the WIA program at Stormont Vail and the friend told him it had given him a second chance and had also helped him to get his GED. Brad contacted the program and was qualified and identified for the youth program. Brad started GED classes at the homeless shelter and started his work internship at Stormont Vail. He was placed in the surgery room where he began to make friends with the adults around him. For the first time in his life, he was treated with respect. It was a trying time for Brad because all of his life experiences had taught him the opposite of what he was learning at Stormont Vail. For instance, Brad was taught how to get away without working, how to do drugs at an early age; how to collect welfare, how to skip school etc, etc, etc.... And those issues had to be identified and addressed several times at the work site. In fact, Brad was suspended from the program because of a marijuana smell on his clothing. He came to realize what was at stake and the consequences of this behavior. As a result, Brad was hired by Stormont Vail and admitted to the surgical tech program. Brad continues to work at a hospital here in Topeka! Brad is married with children and is often seen at a local schools football and basketball games with his kids. Of Brad's two brothers one was in jail and the other works at a local quick shop.

June

June was born in Puerto Rico. Junes' mother sold her into the sex slave industry run by the Puerto Rican mafia at the age of 5. June was picked up by a bus from her kindergarten and dropped off at the brothel where she was brutalized nightly. When June's grandmother visited from the States and realized what was going on, she made plans to kidnap her and bring her back to the U.S. June eventually became a U.S. citizen and attended Topeka public schools where she was identified with a learning disability. June struggled with her past but was so determined to make it in her new life. June entered the WIA program in her senior year and worked at Stormont Vail on a nursing floor while still attending her high school classes. June completed Certified Nurse Aid (CNA) training. She is now a licensed CNA and employed at a local hospital.

Brandy

Brandy was diagnosed with multiple diagnoses at a young age, including bi-polar disorder, depression and aggressive behavior. She was institutionalized off and on for several years and was in and out of foster care. With proper medication and counseling, Brandy reentered society during her sophomore year. After high school she entered the WIA program at Stormont Vail. She worked on a nursing floor and attended a CNA class that was paid for by WIA. Brandy now works at a nursing home as a CNA and volunteers at a local hospital. She also does missionary work for a local church.

Steven

Steven and his brother were raised by their grandmother and grandfather after Steven's dad died when he was in 6th grade. Steven's mother gave up her rights when the boys were very young. Steven's grandmother passed away in the summer of 2010. Steven was a normal child until he was diagnosed with dystonia at age 13. His neurological functions suddenly changed. Dystonia is similar to cerebral palsy and limits fine motor coordination. Fortunately, Steven's case is mild compared to others. At a time when most young boys are developing their basketball shots and long handed throws, Steven was trying to control his facial features and keep his speech from slurring. In high school, Steven was also identified with a learning disability. In his senior year Steven entered the WIA youth program at Stormont Vail. He worked in the environmental services department. Before graduating from high school, Steven's work site supervisor asked to hire Steven as a permanent employee. Steven continues there to this day and helps train other WIA students.