

In-Home Learning System:

Technology for delivery of education and training to government-funded programs in Missouri

Introduction

In early 2011, the southwestern region of Missouri had an unemployment rate well above 7%. And a few months later, the unemployment rate hovered at 8.7%, due largely in part to a devastating EF-5 tornado that swept through the region. After the destruction of 8,400 houses, 18,000 cars, 450 businesses and the loss of 161 of its citizens, it is not surprising that the region was having a difficult time bouncing back. It is around this time that the Workforce Offices of the Ozark, Springfield and Joplin regions of Missouri (now collectively referred to as Missouri Career Center) began enrolling eligible individuals in the Business Access In-Home Learning System as a means to fight back against the high unemployment rate.

The Program

The In-Home Learning System (IHLS) is a self-sufficiency development program. Individuals, or “Achievers” as they are called, are guided every step of the way so that they can reach the end goal of increased employment retention, higher wages and long-term self-sufficiency. Achievers are given laptop computers preloaded with learning modules and internet access for 12 months, so that they can complete their curriculums from anywhere. The curriculum is individually assigned but Achievers also receive across the board work readiness training. Upon successful completion of the program, Achievers earn ownership of their laptops.

Goals

The goals of this program are:

- Completion of the core curriculum within the first 30 days
- Increase job skills
- Meet monthly participation requirements for 12 months
- Secure unsubsidized employment
- Maintain full time employment for 60 days; or, employment leading to benefit denial in less than 60 days

Eligibility

The IHLS program is designed to meet the requirements of the TANF Final Rule as it relates to vocational education, job skills and education directly related to employment. In order to enroll in the IHLS program, individuals were required to be unemployed and not currently meeting TANF participation requirements due to identified barriers such as transportation and childcare. The program serves youth and adults as well as the disabled, and a large immigrant population. The average participant is female, mid-twenties to early thirties and the vast majority has at least one child.

Results

Since its implementation in 2011, 214 people have enrolled in the Missouri Career Center IHLS program. 126 have completed and graduated from the program. 82 of those Achievers (66%) have reported gaining employment either during the IHLS program or following it. Of those 214, there are currently 5 individuals actively participating in the program. An astounding 18,827 online educational courses have been completed by Achievers and participation hours over the life of the program are well above 100,000.

A Closer Look: Lisa’s Story

Aside from looking at facts and figures that attest to its success, we can also look to the Achievers themselves. After moving back to Southwest City, Missouri in 2011, Lisa M. was at a low point. Her daughter had been diagnosed with cancer at the age of 4 and the tumor in her brain was progressing with no hope in sight. Lisa decided to move to be closer to her family for emotional support. Lisa made the move in part because she also thought she would have no trouble finding a job in her new town. Unfortunately, Lisa was wrong — she was unable to find any employer willing to hire her, especially given the fact that she would need to have a lot of time off due to her daughter’s very necessary medical appointments.



A New Start

After a difficult three months Lisa lost all hope of finding employment. At this point she looked to the state for help. The caseworker assigned to Lisa told her about the Business Access In-Home Learning System as a way to improve her skills and make her more hireable. Lisa was intrigued, signed up and began the program in March 2012.

A Brighter Future

She diligently followed all the program requirements and was able to increase her knowledge of computer software which she considers a very valuable asset. Because the computer came equipped with internet access she was able to enroll in online classes in order to earn a degree in Psychology. "With the flexibility given to me by BA, I was able to meet my weekly requirements, continue to search for employment, further my education, and meet my children's needs. I was able to take my laptop with me to my daughter's medical appointments and because of the internet, I was able to research and find additional information and treatment options for my daughter."

Since her graduation from program, much of Lisa's daughter's tumor has been removed and she is hopeful for the future - "My family's future looks brighter than it has in years and I owe much of that to this program and the wonderful people involved!"

