

SUCCESS STORY— E1MN COLLABORATION



Spotlight on Kenny and his team of professionals:
Reesa Wischnack, Gina Schuenke, Meagan Nishi, Jennifer Madigan



Paving the road to employment

A collaborative partnership and work-based learning experiences improve a youth's employment journey



Kenny is a high school graduate who is inquisitive and often quick to look up random topics that come up in conversation. Kenny also likes

watching HGTV, playing video games, and helping care for foster cats. He has a great sense of humor, which he uses to build rapport with others. He is determined and skilled in finding solutions that work for him.

Kenny uses a wheelchair, has limited mobility, and has a developmental cognitive disability. Many job descriptions are written in a way that exclude him. As he has worked to

find employment, Kenny's support team has helped him understand his skills and interests. He was able to try different types of work while still in high school.

MINNESOTA'S YOUTH IN TRANSITION FRAMEWORK PROMOTES YOUTHS' GOALS

Kenny's team exemplifies how to use [Minnesota's Youth in Transition Framework](#) to support youth with disabilities to obtain employment.

The Framework is part of Minnesota's [E1MN Partnership](#). E1MN is a way of working together to develop and deliver a coordinated support system. A coordinated support system helps people with disabilities know their options and get what they



WHO'S WHO

Reesa Wischnack, Rehabilitation Therapist Supervisor for Community-Based Services at the Minnesota Department of Human Services' Minnesota State Operated Community Services (MSOCS).

Gina Schuenke, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED).

Meagan Nishi, Work-Based Learning Coordinator at The Next Step Transition Program in North St. Paul.

Jennifer Madigan, Consumer Directed Community Supports Coordinator at Ramsey County.

“I could better understand what environments and tasks suited me and where my strengths and weaknesses were.”

—Kenny

need to reach their goals, including competitive integrated employment. Kenny’s story shows how successes along the way, like productive collaboration and insightful work-based learning experiences, pave the road to a job.

Minnesota’s Youth in Transition Framework makes professionals’ jobs easier so they can better support youth like Kenny to find meaningful employment. This teamwork leads to better outcomes for youth accessing services—including overcoming barriers. The Framework:

- promotes the goals of youth and the teams that support them,
- is flexible to meet the needs of any youth with disabilities,
- makes professionals’ jobs easier by providing clarity and efficiency, and
- builds consistency and equity across the state.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS TO FIND, COMPLETE, AND LEARN FROM WORK EXPERIENCES

Kenny’s support team works together to promote stronger outcomes. This team has collaborated well, and their work shows the positive change teams can make by using the Framework to work together.

As one example, **collaboration and coordination among professionals supports youth to access paid**

competitive integrated work experiences while still in high school. These “[work-based learning experiences](#)” improve employment for youth with disabilities once they graduate.¹ The [Types of Work-Based Learning Experiences tool](#) can help teams consider options. The goal is for every high school student to get experience in competitive integrated work prior to graduation.

In an example of the Framework’s [shared practice](#) of **collaborative partnerships**, this team meets regularly to talk about people with whom they are working and fill any gaps, said Meagan Nishi, Work-based Learning Coordinator at Next Step Transition Program in North St. Paul. A youth might be interested in a type of workplace where Next Step does not have a relationship, for example. In this case, Meagan would turn to DEED Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Gina Schuenke for more workplace connections.

With each work experience, the team builds its understanding of youths’ skills, abilities, and accommodation requirements. They use these insights for continued planning. For example, they learned Kenny has exceptional memory for details and is skilled in researching topics on a computer. The team also learned



Developed by E1MN and transition leaders statewide, [Minnesota’s Youth in Transition Framework](#) strengthens the partnership between schools, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)/State Services for the Blind (SSB), waiver case managers and service providers.

what accommodations a workplace needs in place to benefit from the skills Kenny would bring to the job.

“I had an opportunity to try out several jobs to get an idea of what I liked and was interested in. This was anything from working at Panera to Plato’s Closet,” Kenny said.

¹Mazzotti, V. L., Rowe, D. A., Kwiatek, S., Voggt, A., Chang, W.-H., Fowler, C. H., Poppen, M., Sinclair, J., & Test, D. W. (2021). Secondary transition predictors of postschool success: An update to the research base. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 44(1), 47–64. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2165143420959793>

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—Jennifer Madigan

“At each location, the school staff and I could better understand what environments and tasks suited me and where my strengths and weaknesses were.”

Once Kenny graduated, the school shared this information with Reesa Wischnack, with MSOCS. In her role, Reesa continues working with Kenny to understand his interests and skills. Then she and her team use everything they have learned to support Kenny to find work. They provide long-term supports, including one-on-one job coaching to support him to be as independent as possible on the job.

STARTING EARLY

Kenny’s story illustrates the Framework’s [guiding principle](#) that **transition planning should start early in a youth’s life**. Before Kenny started his job search, he spent time exploring his interests and abilities.

The [Transition/Pre-ETS Inventory](#) is a tool teams can use to help with early planning. It helps identify a youth’s transition strengths and needs and prioritizes topics to address in the next year. It helps the youth and their team decide who will support each topic. Students can discover their interests early to inform work experiences in later years of high school. Meagan said the team is working to connect

students to Vocational Rehabilitation Services earlier, while still in high school and prior to enrollment in a transition program.

FOLLOWING THE YOUTH PLANNING PROCESS

The Framework also encourages a consistent [youth planning process](#). Following this process helps ensure:

- the right people join a youth’s team,
- everyone knows their role,
- the team works together to coordinate and provide the right services at the right time,
- they communicate progress, and
- the youth gets what they need to be successful.

For example, Kenny and his team had identified [work-based learning](#) as a transition need. They discussed what type of experience he wanted and which team members would help make it happen.

CLARITY FOR FAMILIES SO THEY CAN PLAY A KEY ROLE

Clarity within the support team **helps youths’ families play a key role**—another [guiding principle](#) in the Framework. The Framework clarifies who does what in the youth planning process with its [role descriptions](#).

Reesa always coordinates with partners when communicating

with youth and their families.

“When I am just starting out with an individual ... I make sure to explain everything as clearly as possible, how each step works,” she said.

“There’s nothing more nerve-racking to families [than] a group of professionals that don’t know who’s going to do what,” said Jennifer Madigan, Ramsey County Consumer Directed Community Supports (CDCS) Coordinator.

“When a family can walk into a group of people and everybody knows what their role is, it’s a lot less daunting to families.”

Jennifer works closely with waiver case managers to support people who choose to use CDCS, a self-directed option available under all Home and Community-Based Waivers. Participants choose services/supports based on their unique needs. CDCS allows people to hire and manage people they want to support them in all areas of life. With regard to employment and CDCS, people can choose to use traditional waiver employment services and providers, or they can use CDCS for their waiver employment services and hire their own supports, like a job coach of their own choosing, or be creative with transportation.

For Kenny, the team’s collaboration led to more work experiences, where he clarified what kind of job he wants and strengthened his resumé. Each work-based learning experience got him closer to the right job for him.

The involvement of the waiver case manager is especially important when someone is on a waiver and needs long-term support to be successful at work. “It’s ideal to have all of us around the table collaborating so the case manager is aware of employment plans from the start. ... You get that information from being a part of the team and following along with the process,” Gina said.

THE JOB SEARCH CONTINUES FOR KENNY

Teamwork among professionals, youth, and families **leads to better outcomes for people accessing services—including overcoming barriers.**

Kenny’s team continues to support him in his job search. For Kenny, the team’s collaboration led to more work experiences, where he clarified what kind of job he wants and strengthened his resumé. Each work-based learning experience got him closer to the right job for him.

“Between school and Vocational Rehab, we are constantly looking or figuring out what those ideal conditions for success are for individuals,” Gina said. “Every student who leaves the transition program, we know what their ideal conditions for success are. ... We have that rich information to help the service

providers take that and go with it, versus recreating the wheel and not finding successful jobs.”

From his work experiences, Kenny developed a portfolio of job applications, with letters of reference, certifications and a resumé. Each experience was also a chance for him to try different accommodations, like tools for increasing his reach, to see what works best. Kenny’s career journey continues as he tries out different jobs.

“Since graduation, I have worked at Cabela’s and Chick-fil-A,” Kenny said. “While neither was the right fit for me, both were opportunities to learn again about what works for me and what doesn’t and what supports I need. The team continues to work with me to look for the right employment fit.”

LEARN MORE

Check out these transition resources:

- [Youth in Transition Toolkit](#)
- [Minnesota’s Youth in Transition Framework](#)
- [Support Youth: Employment](#)