

Workforce Connections Report

January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025



**Career Learning Center
of the Black Hills**



BHSSC
Better Learning • Better Lives

About the Program

The Career Learning Center of the Black Hills (CLCBH), an initiative of Black Hills Special Services Cooperative (BHSSC), was awarded funding from the John T. Vucurevich Foundation to strengthen pathways from adult education into postsecondary education and training. This investment supports adults as they move beyond GED completion and toward credentials and degrees that lead to family-sustaining wages and meet workforce needs in the Black Hills region.

Workforce Connections is the program through which this work is carried out. The program focuses on individualized guidance and sustained support for adults pursuing education and career advancement.

Clients receive tailored assistance including:

- Support with GED completion
- Career exploration and postsecondary planning
- One-on-one mentoring focused on education and training goals
- Help offsetting education and training costs
- Limited financial assistance to reduce barriers to persistence
- Connection to community resources and services
- Resume development and job readiness support
- Interview preparation and skill-building

About the Program

Mentor-Based Support Model

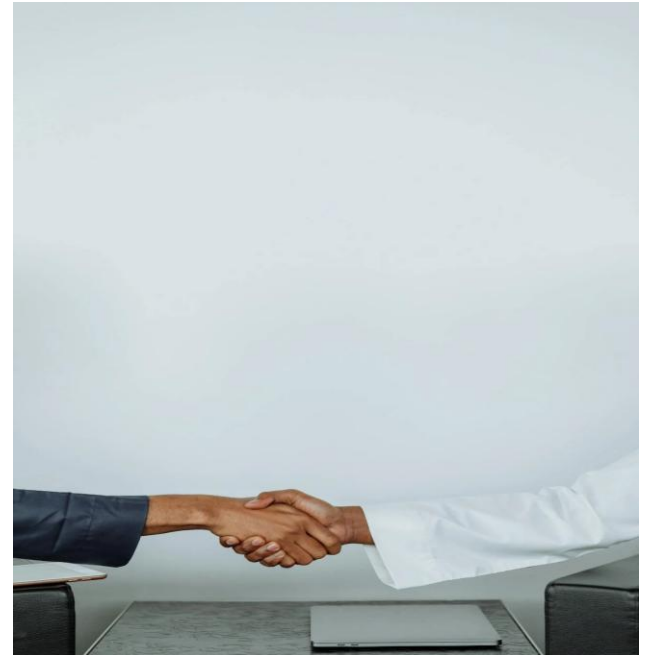
- Each Workforce Connections client is paired with a dedicated mentor
- Clients are referred through BHSSC programs and community partners

Individualized Goal Setting & Support

- Mentors help clients identify and work toward education, employment, and personal goals
- Ongoing support includes regular check-ins, limited crisis assistance, and coordinated referrals (“warm handoffs”) to partner agencies

Strong Community Collaboration

- Community partners participate in the Workforce Connections Coalition
- Quarterly coalition meetings focus on:
 - Celebrating client successes
 - Strengthening referral pathways
 - Joint problem-solving to address barriers



Coalition Members & Other Community Partners

Workforce, Education, and Career Pathways

- **SD Department of Labor and Regulation (AEL Program):** GED preparation, postsecondary education access, and job placement support
- **West River Health Education Center:** Healthcare career training pathways
- **Elevate Rapid City:** Workforce development and employer connections
- **Vocational Rehabilitation:** Employment and training referrals for individuals with disabilities
- **Driver's Education Programs:** Workforce Connections covers enrollment costs for clients
- **BHSU, Western Dakota Technical College, South Dakota School of Mines & Technology:** Postsecondary education referrals
- **MG Oil:** Financial support for GED students

Housing Stability and Emergency Assistance

- **Pennington County Health and Human Services:** Emergency assistance
- **Pennington County Housing:** Housing vouchers and rental assistance
- **OneHeart:** Temporary housing
- **Cornerstone Mission Shelters:** Housing referrals for men, women, and children
- **Western South Dakota Community Action Program:** Emergency housing, legal assistance, and community classes
- **McKinney-Vento Program:** Homelessness referrals for families

Coalition Members & Other Community Partners

Childcare, Early Childhood, and Family Support

- **SD Department of Social Services:** Economic and child care assistance
- **Youth and Family Services (YFS):** Childcare, classes, and case management
- **Rural American Initiatives:** Childcare support
- **Starting Strong:** Childcare and preschool services
- **BrightStart:** Nurse home visits and family referrals
- **Volunteers of America (Mommy's Closet):** Material support for families with young children
- **CSS:** Referrals for Uplifting Parents Program.

Food Security and Basic Needs

- **Feeding South Dakota:** Food assistance, including onsite pantry support for GED and Workforce Connections clients
- **Fork Real:** Family literacy events and food assistance
- **West River Foundation:** Sponsor of the Career Learning Center food pantry

Coalition Members & Other Community Partners

Health, Mental Health, and Substance Use Services

- **Community Health Center:** Medical and mental health referrals
- **Oyate Health Center:** Medical and mental health referrals
- **West River Mental Health:** Mental health services
- **City-County Drug and Alcohol Program:** Substance use treatment referrals

Transportation and Practical Supports

- **SHIFT Garage:** Vehicle repairs and donated vehicles

Financial Literacy, Counseling, and Stability

- **Consumer Credit Counseling:** Financial counseling and literacy referrals
- **Catholic Social Services (CSS):** Uplifting Parents Program referrals and counseling
- **Love INC.:** Life INC classes and supportive referrals

Family Engagement and Community Education

- **SD Statewide Family Engagement Center:** Parent and student literacy support and community education, including the Poverty Escape Room and Cliff Effect Escape Room

Evaluation Methodology



Workforce Connections (WC), BHSSC, and the John T. Vucurevich Foundation developed an internal monitoring and dashboard system to ensure program evaluation directly impacts program intervention and client success. After the last Coalition meeting, BHSSC evaluators, with support from the John T. Vucurevich Foundation designed and implemented a new, in-house monitoring system that functions both as a Customer/Client Relationship Management (CRM) and a data tracking resource linked to a live dashboard.

WC staff collects longitudinal client data across a number of indicators on the Crisis to Thrive Scale. Dr. Ryan Young, Evaluation Project Director, and Matthew Sutton, Grants/Evaluation Specialist at BHSSC provide data collection and formatting support. This report was compiled using data collected over the past 5 years of Workforce Connection's operation.

Active Client Profile

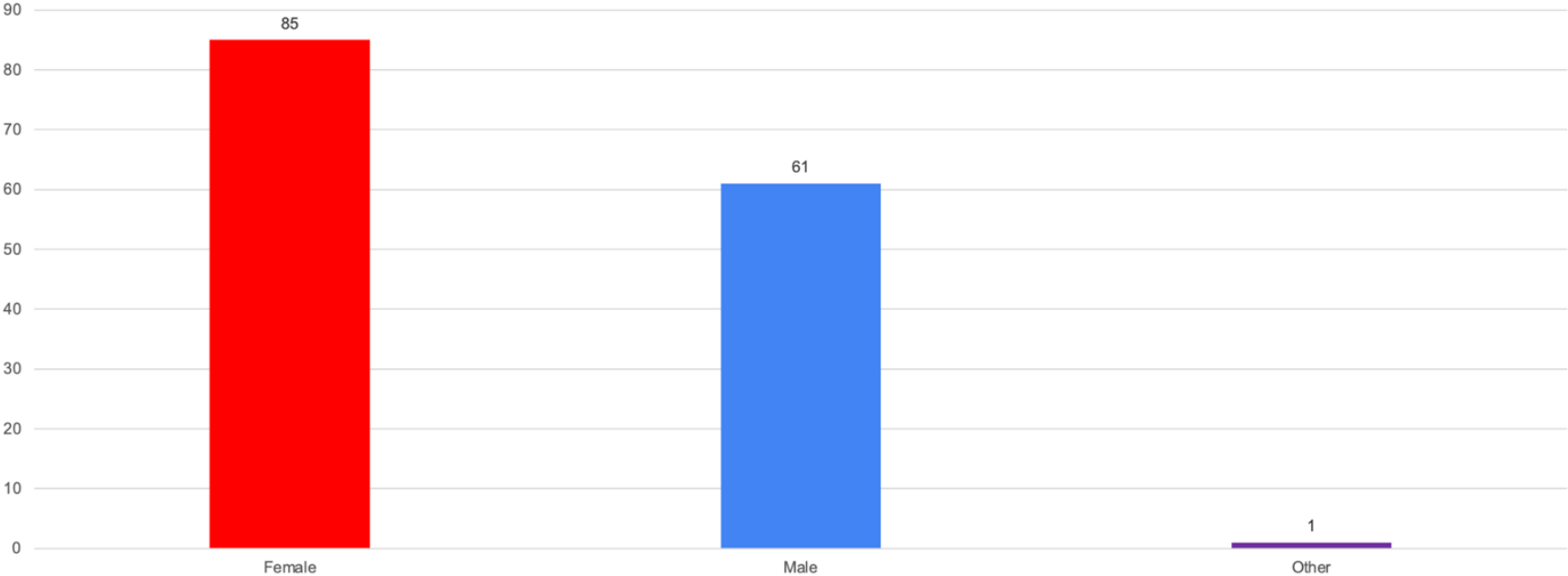
Workforce Connections has served 147 individual clients from September 2020 through 2025. In 2025, 17 new clients were onboarded, contributing to a current active caseload of 63 adults served by the program.

These individuals bring with them a diverse set of life experiences, personal strengths, and challenges. However, they are all united by low to no household income, with all clients meeting Medicaid expanded low-income eligibility requirements and an average reported annual income of \$2,293.37.

Charts: Gender, Age, Race, Ethnicity, Relationship Status

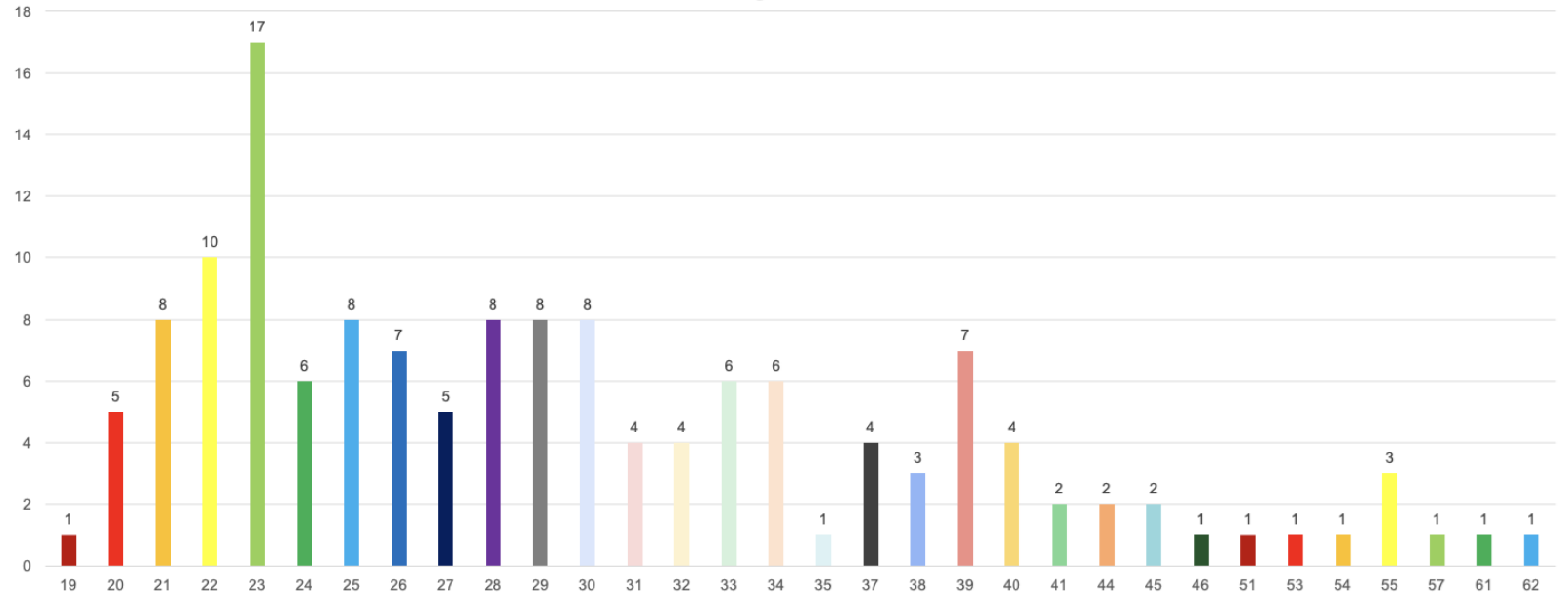
Gender Breakdown

Gender

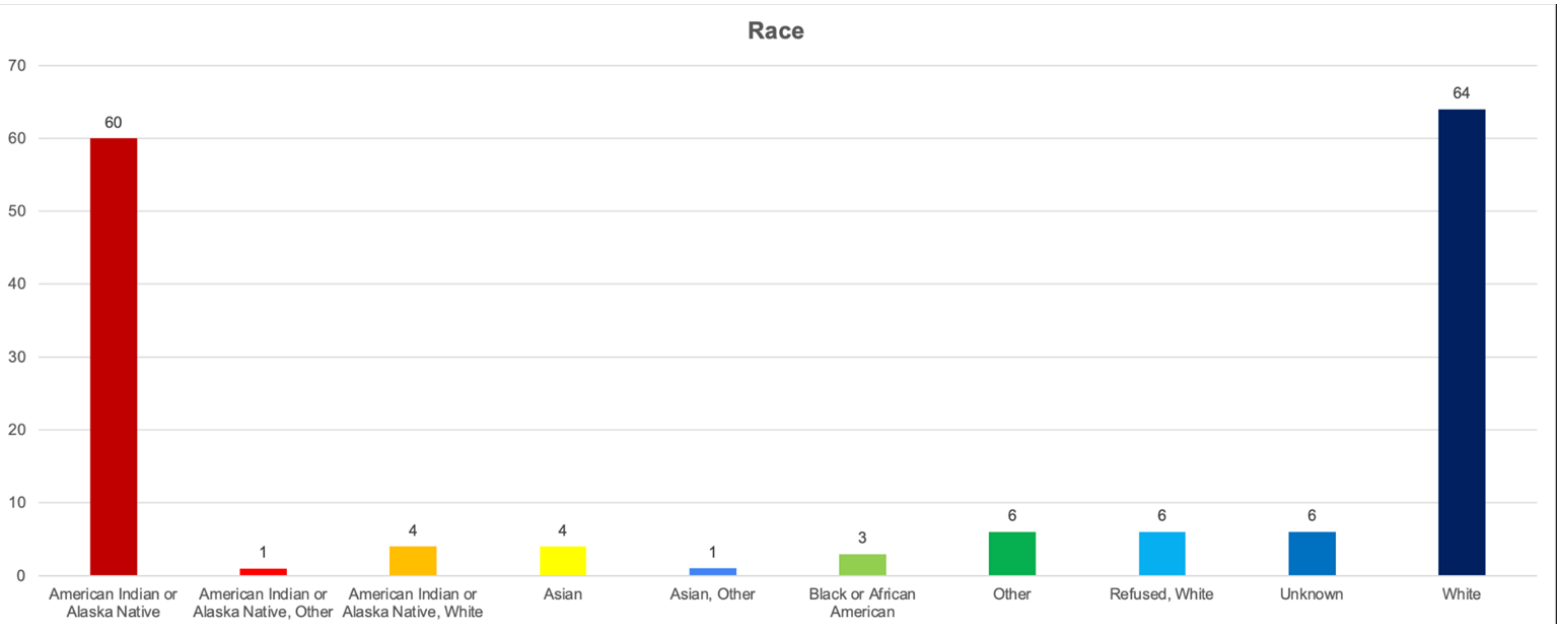


Age Breakdown

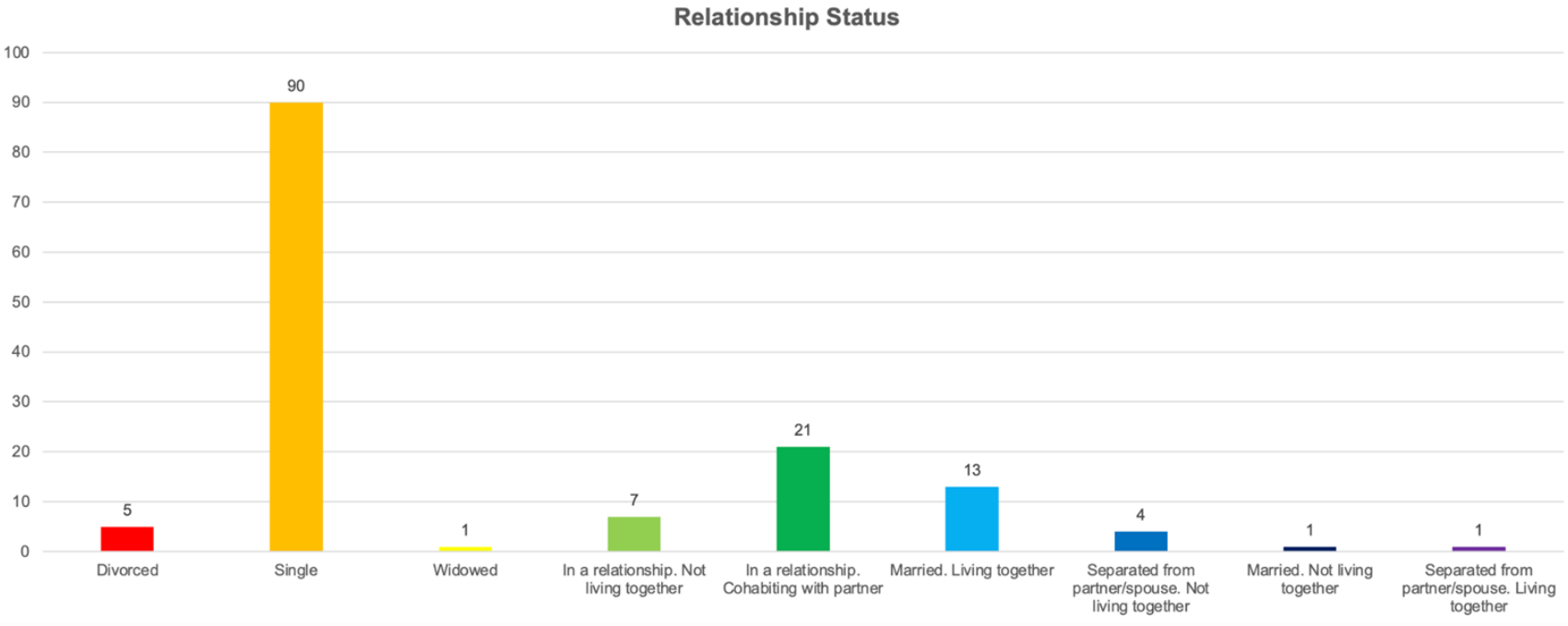
Current Age Count



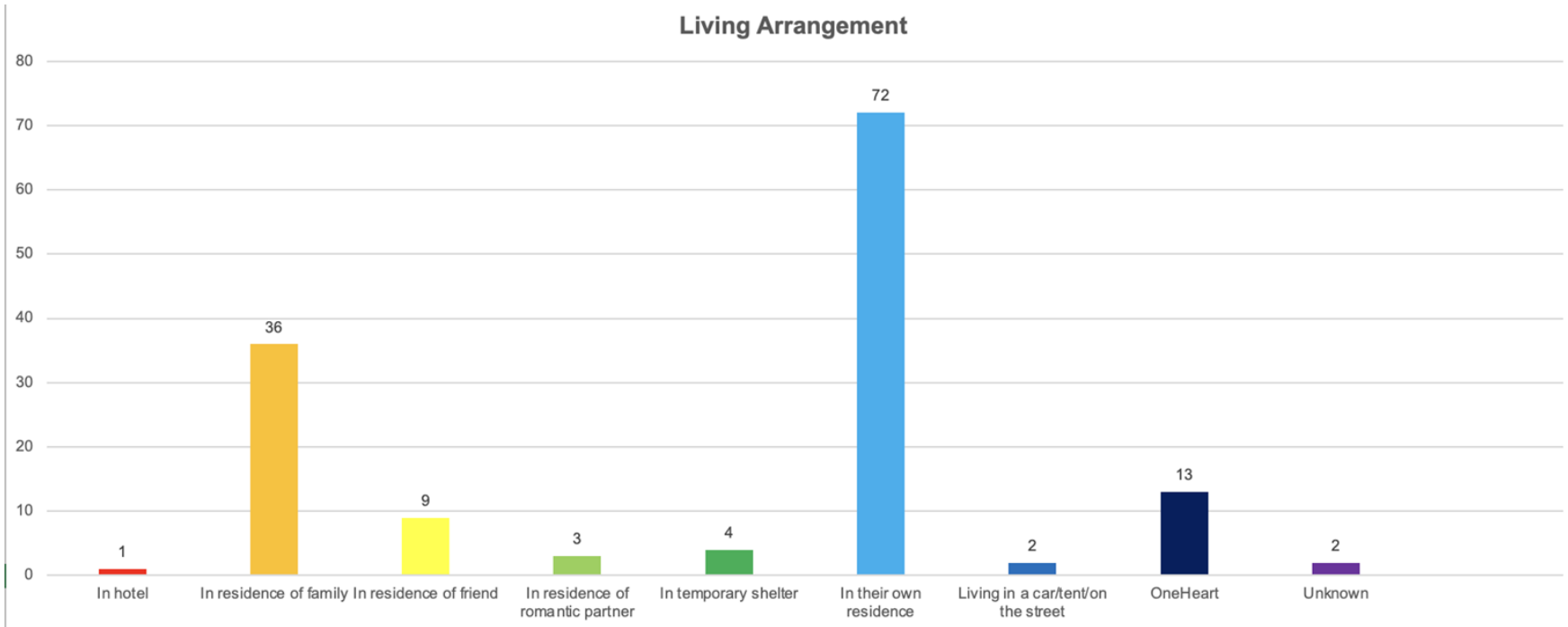
Race Demographics



Client Relationship Status



Client Living Arrangements



Crisis to Thrive Scale

The Pathways to Prosperity Crisis to Thrive Matrix is an adapted version of the 2010 Snohomish County Self-Sufficiency Matrix. This scale was initially modified by Callie Tysdal, then of Benchmark Data Labs, and Tracy Palecek for the Prosperity Initiative client monitoring system. Clients were ranked on a scale of 1 to 10 in 5 areas: childcare, education, employment, housing, and transportation. Each data point was supported further qualitative explanation of why the client was ranked thus. Client data was tracked each time a mentor interacted with the client.

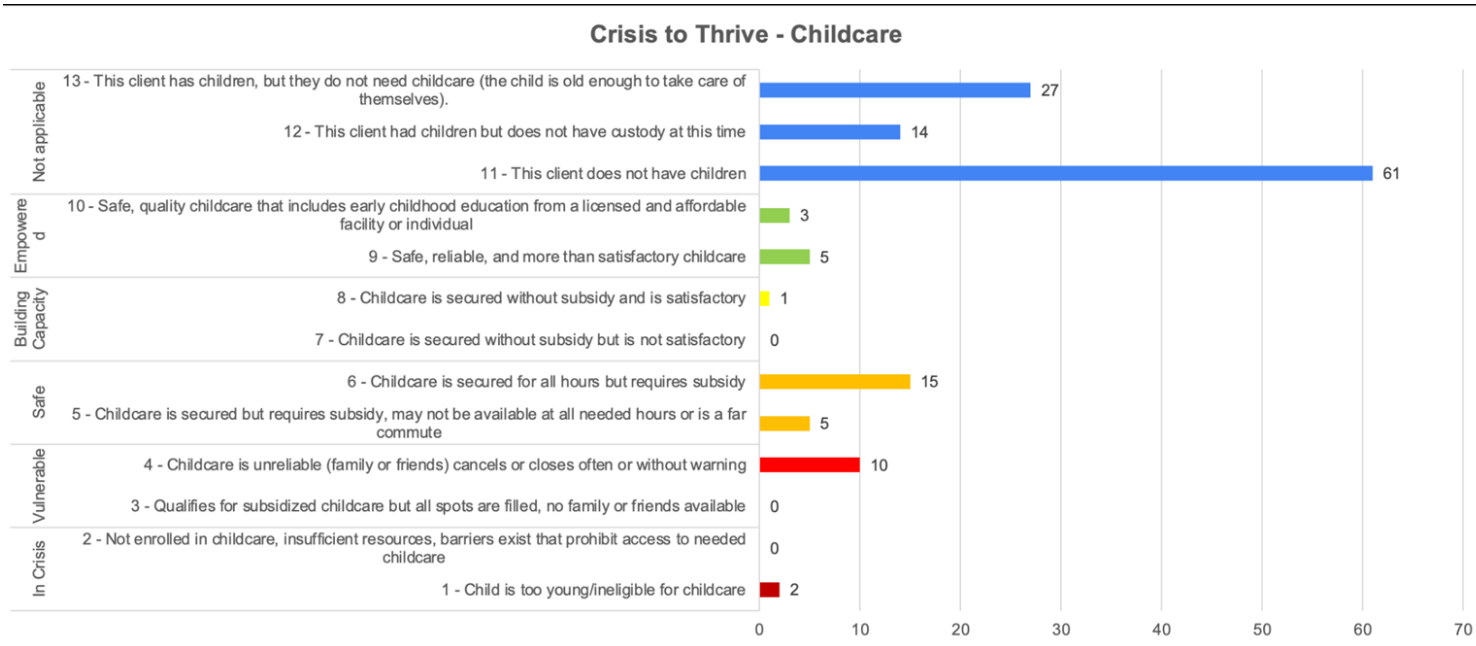
The following is an analysis of clients served during their first and last meeting with their mentor. As the program monitoring continues, longitudinal comparisons will be made for each client.

Childcare

The following is the Crisis to Thrive scale for childcare. Mentors noted their clients status after each meeting and shared additional context in a comment section.

Scale	Rank	Explanation
In Crisis	1	Child is too young/ineligible for childcare
	2	Not enrolled in childcare, insufficient resources, barriers exist that prohibit access to needed childcare
Vulnerable	3	Qualifies for subsidized childcare but all spots are filled, no family or friends available
	4	Childcare is unreliable (family or friends) cancels or closes often or without warning
Safe	5	Childcare is secured but requires subsidy, may not be available at all needed hours or is a far commute
	6	Childcare is secured for all hours, but requires subsidy
Building Capacity	7	Childcare is secured without subsidy but is not satisfactory
	8	Childcare is secured without subsidy and is satisfactory
Empowered	9	Safe, reliable, and more than satisfactory childcare
	10	Safe, quality childcare that includes early childhood education from licensed and affordable facility or individual
Not applicable	11	This client does not have children
	12	This client had children but does not have custody at this time
	13	This client has children but they do not need childcare (child is old enough to take care of themselves)

Childcare



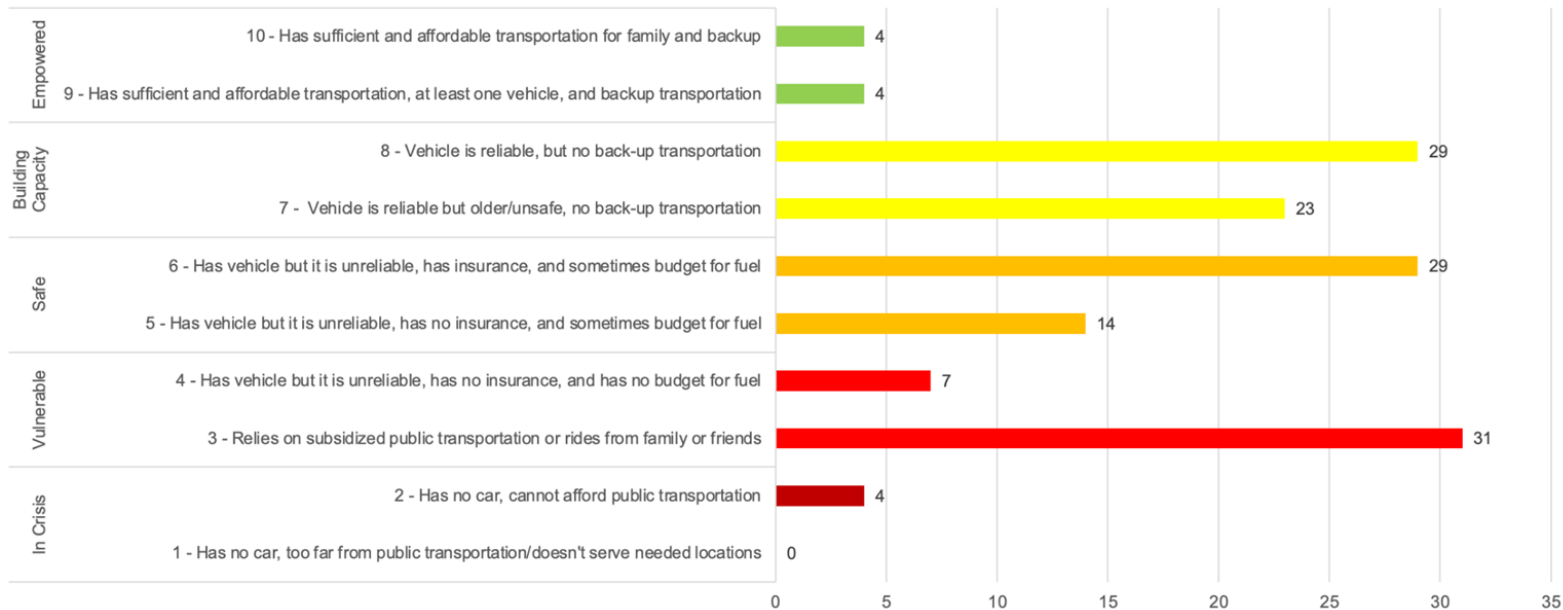
There are 102 clients that do not need to utilize childcare at this time.

Transportation

Scale	Rank	Explanation
In Crisis	1	Has no car, too far from public transportation/doesn't serve needed locations
	2	Has no car, cannot afford public transportation
Vulnerable	3	Relies on subsidized public transportation or rides from family or friends
	4	Has vehicle but is unreliable, has no insurance, and has no budget for fuel
Safe	5	Has vehicle but is unreliable, has no insurance, and sometimes budget for fuel
	6	Has vehicle but is unreliable, has insurance, and sometimes budget for fuel
Building Capacity	7	Vehicle is reliable but older/unsafe, no back-up transportation
	8	Vehicle is reliable, but no back up transportation
Empowered	9	Has sufficient and affordable transportation, at least one vehicle, and backup transportation
	10	Has sufficient and affordable transportation for family and backup

Transportation

Crisis to Thrive - Transportation

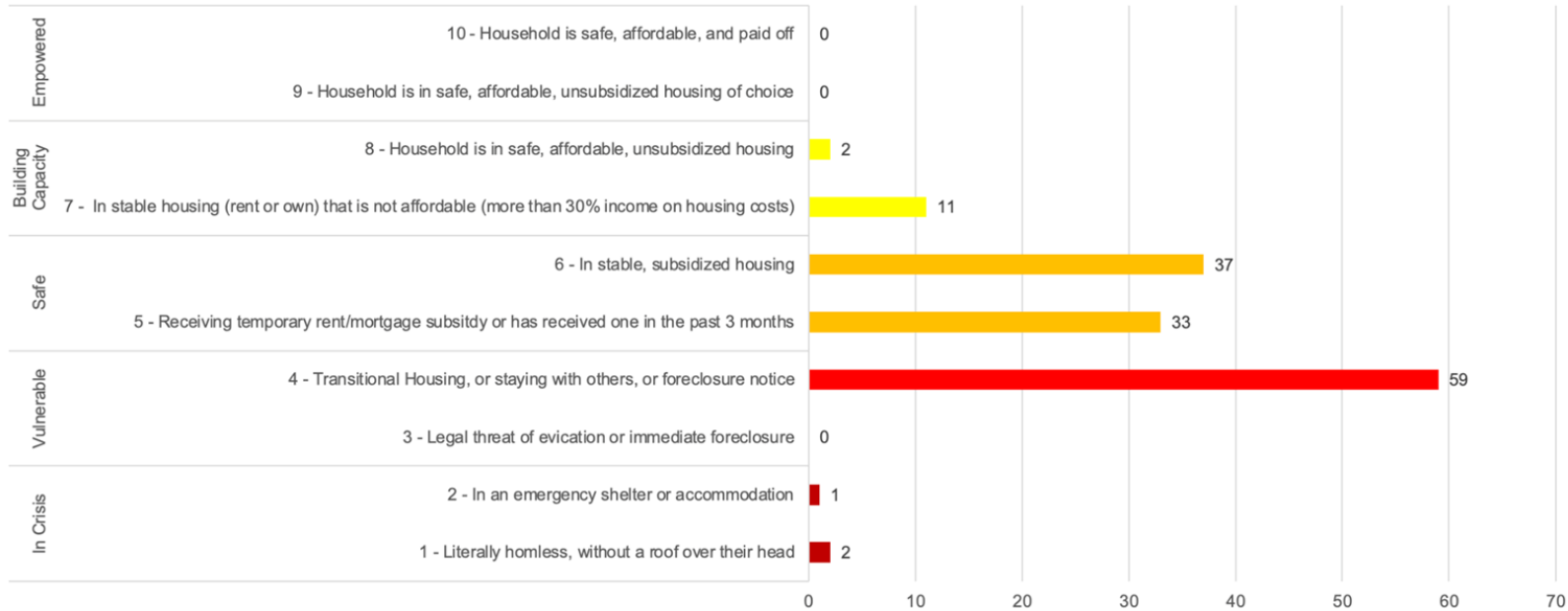


Housing

Scale	Rank	Explanation
In Crisis	1	Literally homeless, without a roof over their head
	2	In an emergency shelter or accommodation
Vulnerable	3	Legal threat of eviction or immediate foreclosure
	4	Transitional housing, or staying with others, or foreclosure notice
Safe	5	Receiving temporary rent/mortgage subsidy or has received one in the past 3 months
	6	In stable, subsidized housing
Building Capacity	7	In stable housing (rent or own) that is not affordable (more than 30% income on housing costs)
	8	Household is in safe, affordable, unsubsidized housing
Empowered	9	Household is in safe, affordable, unsubsidized housing of choice
	10	Household is safe, affordable, and paid off

Housing

Crisis to Thrive - Housing

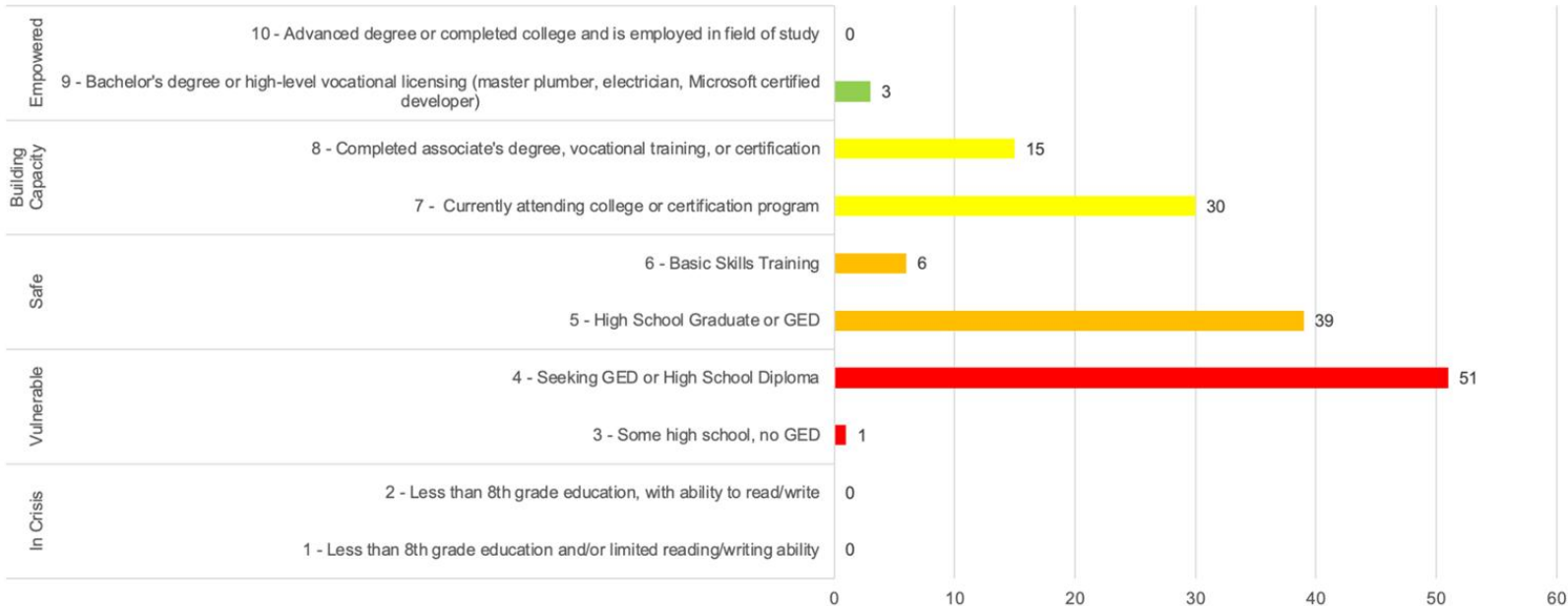


Education

Scale	Rank	Explanation
In Crisis	1	Less than 8th grade education and/or limited reading/writing ability
	2	Less than 8th grade education, with ability to read/write
Vulnerable	3	Some high school, no GED
	4	Seeking GED or High School Diploma
Safe	5	High School Graduate or GED
	6	Basic Skills Training
Building Capacity	7	Currently attending college or certification program
	8	Completed associates degree, vocational training or certification
Empowered	9	Bachelor's Degree or high level vocational licensing (master plumber, electrician, Microsoft certified developer)
	10	Advanced degree or completed college and is employed in field of study

Education

Crisis to Thrive - Education

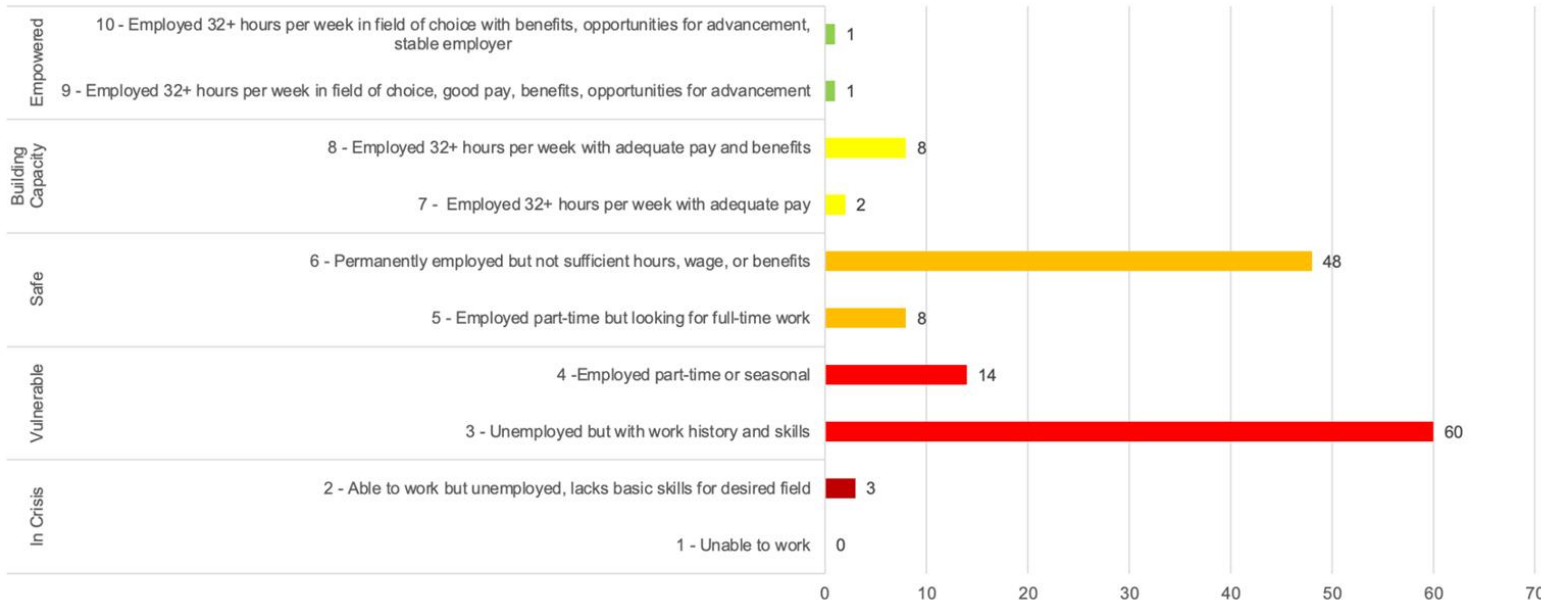


Employment

Scale	Rank	Explanation
In Crisis	1	Unable to work
	2	Able to work but unemployed, lacks basis skills for desired field
Vulnerable	3	Unemployed but with work history and skills
	4	Employed part time or seasonal
Safe	5	Employed part time but looking for fulltime work
	6	Permanently employed but not sufficient hours, wage, or benefits
Building Capacity	7	Employed 32+ hours per week with adequate pay
	8	Employed 32+ hours per week with adequate pay and benefits
Empowered	9	Employed 32+ hours per week in field of choice, good pay, benefits, opportunities for advancement
	10	Employed 32+ hours per week in field of choice with benefits opportunities for advancement, stable employer

Employment

Crisis to Thrive - Employment



Crisis to Thrive Scale Trends

New client-level data analysis shows that program impact increases with sustained engagement in Workforce Connections (WC). Among clients who completed mentorship activities at least twice, the average length of participation is 362 days, with measurable improvement across all areas of the Crisis to Thrive Scale (1–10).

Average gains for these clients include:

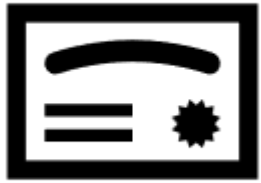
- Education: +0.80
- Employment: +0.59
- Childcare: +0.21
- Housing: +0.19
- Transportation: +0.31

Clients who remain in the program for more than two years experience even greater gains, particularly in domains tied to long-term stability and self-sufficiency:

- Education: +1.55
- Employment: +1.10
- Transportation: +1.35

These results demonstrate that while meaningful progress occurs within the first year, extended participation is strongly associated with deeper educational, professional, and personal success.

Current Successes



60 clients have obtained their GEDs through Workforce Connections



147 clients have received career counseling through Workforce Connections



60 clients have have started a post secondary or certificate program



1 client completed their post secondary education through the Workforce Connections program



40 clients have completed a career interest assessment



20 clients completed have their certificate program through the Workforce Connections program

Income



Most clients enter the program with **very limited financial stability**. Nearly **one in three report no income at intake**, and the **average annual income of incoming clients is just \$2,293.37**, underscoring the depth of economic need.

Program participation is associated with **meaningful income gains over time**:

- **Overall average change: +\$210.96 per month**
- **Less than 1 year in program: -\$210.96 per month**, reflecting early instability and transition
- **1–2 years in program: +\$64.87 per month**, indicating gradual progress
- **Over 2 years in program: +\$927.48 per month**, demonstrating substantial long-term gains

These findings suggest that **income growth accelerates with sustained engagement**, reinforcing the importance of longer-term participation and ongoing support to achieve financial stability.

Direct Assistance - Client Support

Since 2020, the program has provided \$91,720.61 in direct assistance, distributed across 3,244 individual assistance instances. With an average direct assistance amount of \$28.16 per occurrence, funding is utilized to alleviate some of the stressors that come along with living in poverty.



Common Funding Needs and Occurrence Count

Gasoline: 400 occurrences

Groceries: 216 occurrences

Household Items: 91 occurrences

Education (books, fees, school-related costs): 107 occurrences

Food / Meals: 40 occurrences

Rent / Deposit: 33 occurrences

Diapers: 17 occurrences

Employment or Work (tools, work-related costs): 22 occurrences

Utilities: 15 occurrences

License, ID, or Birth Certificate: 12 occurrences

Travel Expenses: 11 occurrences

Clothing: 9 occurrences

Child Care: 2 occurrences

Health Care (non-dental/vision): 3 occurrences

Eye Care: 3 occurrences

Dental Care: 2 occurrences

Hotel: 1 occurrence

Legal Aid: 1 occurrence

Other (misc. client-specific needs): 80 occurrences

Vehicle Needs: 42 occurrences

Discretionary Funding Trends

Direct Assistance funding has grown substantially since 2020, reflecting both increased client need and expanded program reach. From 2020–2024, total discretionary assistance rose steadily as the number of assistance instances increased each year.

Key trends include:

- Total assistance distributed (2020–2025): \$91,720.61 across 3,244 assistance instances
- Average amount per assistance (overall): \$28.27
- Strong year-over-year growth from 2021–2024, with annual increases ranging from 24.85% to 91.57%
- 2025 shows a 25.42% decrease in total dollars

Though, average assistance amount increased sharply to \$74.54

Overall, this trend indicates that discretionary funds are increasingly used as targeted, high-impact supports, helping clients stabilize housing, transportation, utilities, and other immediate needs while progressing toward longer-term self-sufficiency.

Client Goals

All clients are encouraged to identify **two to three personal goals** during their intake process. At least one goal is typically focused on **education, training, or employment**, while additional goals often address stability and barriers that impact long-term success. Mentors support clients through regular check-ins, encouragement, accountability, and connection to resources as they work toward achieving these goals.

Education-Related Goals

A total of **182 goals** were education related. These goals often represent the first step toward economic mobility and serve as a foundation for later employment success. Mentors provide ongoing support to help clients navigate educational systems and persist toward completion.

Common education goals included:

- Earning a GED or high school diploma
- Enrolling in or completing postsecondary education
- Applying for college
- Completing FAFSA or scholarship applications
- Participating in training or certification programs



Client Goals Cont.

Employment-Related Goals

A total of **66 goals** were employment related. These goals frequently build upon educational progress and focus on improving job quality and long-term career prospects.

Common employment goals included:

- Obtaining full-time employment
- Securing a higher-wage position
- Finding employment with benefits such as healthcare or paid time off
- Exploring jobs with on-the-job training or apprenticeship opportunities

Other / Stability-Focused Goals

An additional **94 goals** addressed broader stability and life circumstances that directly affect clients' ability to succeed in education and employment.

Examples of these goals included:

- Improving financial stability
- Obtaining a driver's license or reliable transportation
- Securing stable housing
- Accessing childcare or childcare assistance
- Regaining or maintaining custody of children
- Improving mental health or completing a recovery program
- Obtaining a vehicle

Together, these goals reflect a holistic approach to supporting clients as they move from crisis toward stability and long-term self-sufficiency.



Client Journey - Morgan

Meet Morgan:

- She is a mother to three children who she cares for full time.
- Lives in her own rental home.
- Attending Black Hills State University as a full time Human Services student.

Morgan's Goals:

- Obtain GED
- Find a college program to enroll in
- Look at job shadowing opportunities and internships.

Morgan's Progress:

- Morgan has met with her mentor approximately 15 times in the last 12 months.
- See the following slide for more details regarding Morgan's progress.



Client Journey - Morgan

6 ● — ● 5

Childcare

Morgan utilizes the Boys Club and Discovery to ensure her children have after school care.

4 ● — ● 7

Education

Morgan has completed her GED and enrolled as a full time college student at Black Hills State University in the Human Services program.

3 ● — ● 3

Employment

Morgan remains unemployed while she is in college full time. She has done job shadowing opportunities frequently

6 ● — ● 6

Housing

Morgan has a stable subsidized rental unit. She has utilized rental support as needed to maintain stable living arrangements.

5 ● — ● 6

Transportation

Morgan has had a vehicle and recently purchased insurance. The vehicle is not always reliable and often needs repairs.

Testimonial about Workforce Connections

“When I started with this program years ago, I was just trying to survive. I didn't know much about life other than a job is a job and you work to make your money to support your family. I didn't have any self-worth, as I had lost my kids to drug addiction. I had previously left a relationship that was dangerous for me and my children, and came to Rapid City for sanctuary, on a whim, and at random. During my GED, I met Julia and she suggested college. She saw something in me I didn't even know was there, something I've now realized everyone has. So off I went to nursing school! I loved it, and I learned that even though I failed high school and had only one credit after dropping out, I was smart. Nursing school demands became too much for me as a single mother with no support, so I put it to the side, and decided I would try criminal justice. I am in my second semester, and I've never felt more sure about a career path. While on this educational journey, Julia has helped with a laptop, with books, and other financial assistance as barriers came up. Julia has also seen me through jobs. My most recent job taught me about fulfillment and it's a job I have thanks to Julia. Just like college, I would never have thought I was capable until Julia suggested being a home health aide. To my surprise, I got the job and I'm very good at it. Needless to say, this program has changed the path of my life as well as my generations to come. I couldn't be more thankful that I've gotten the chance to really know what life is supposed to be like. This program is one for the books.” - Megan, Workforce Connections Client

Testimonial about Workforce Connections

“Due to my time with workforce connections, I have had many opportunities open up for me. I want to thank you for instilling a mindset of hopefulness for me. A year ago I never would have imagined the life I have now. My current goals and career path are all thanks to this program. I am more stable and passionate about education and workplace advancement than I ever have been. I have a job I love in healthcare that was introduced to me by this program. With the tools, scrubs, and support I was given I joined the healthcare field. I am excited to be enrolling in college to continue my career and get my LPN. All thanks to this program for offering me support, structure, guidance, and purpose.” - Darcy, Workforce Connections Client

Testimonial about Workforce Connections

“Kazumi Tinant, an English language learner at the Career Learning Center of the Black Hills, advanced from substitute teaching to a full-time elementary teacher thanks to her dedication and perseverance in our ESL class. In partnership with the Workforce Connections program, Kazumi was provided essential exam preparation materials, exam scholarships, mentorship, and encouragement that helped her overcome obstacles along the way. She actively contributes to our organization by teaching several Community Education of the Black Hills classes. Her hard work is turning her career goals into reality and inspiring others to pursue their dreams.” - Desiree Kranz, ESL Teacher

Thank you!

Questions?

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