



ASSURED FAMILY SERVICES

# THE TURN AROUND CAFE IS TURNING LIVES AROUND

In Michigan, youth at age 17 are charged and sentenced as adults and sent to adult jails and prisons. This incarceration is unsafe for these young people to be serving time with serious adult offenders. These youth present a higher risk during jail time due to the Michigan requirement to segregate the 17-year-olds from other older adults in jail and prison. Many of our colleagues working in jails recognize that “these kids just don’t belong here.”

A call to Assured Family Services (AFS), a grant from the Flynn Foundation entitled “Turn Around” and some creative relational case management has placed some of the Wayne County youth in jail back in their communities with strong support and direction. In the past two years, more than 65 youth, aged 17 at the time of the criminal charge, have been released to our care and coordination, and

only one has been found guilty of a subsequent offense. Helping the family, the school and relationships to support the young person is part of the intensive case management. When we ask the youth what they need to stay away from trouble and make better choices, the straightforward answer is: “I need a job; I need to make money so I can make a life.”

These young people are struggling with the homelessness, loss of family connections, family member death and prison, and have not engaged in school or had good support networks. These missed opportunities have caused serious misdirection in their social choices and community relationships. These circumstances lead to the youth facing a situation of jail time, a conviction and a more limited future.

Achieving stability for young adults is difficult when they cannot envision

any course other than a life of crime. The defeated attitudes, limited skills and restricted ideas of a future foretell their outcomes if there is no new plan with actions and interventions. A new kind of experience is needed that allows the youth to learn, be mentored and have work/learn environments that are safe, supportive and real. Assuring that strong relationships are attained, and providing education and hope is the vision of the Turn Around Café. This work force venture provides real work experiences to these high-risk young adults so they are able to succeed at their own rate, develop a work ethic, and realize the satisfaction and accomplishment of tangible, paid employment. Success brings hope. Hope brings confidence. Confidence creates actions in a positive forward motion.

Turn Around Café, located at 7310 Woodward Avenue near the Detroit Q-Line Rail, is a supportive young adult employment program that provides subsidized, pre-job readiness development with on-the-job experience that enhances pro-social soft skills, resumé ready abilities, interviewing, basic employment expectations and experience. The provision of paid on-the-job training and support within a safe and close environment better ensures sequential learning, conceptual thinking, communication development, accountability, customer service skills and entrepreneur experience. The professional environment provides the young adults with a place to become a part of a unique work force in the community. Turn Around Café establishes a safe, structured environment in which youth can learn and practice service skills with customers, personal time management, work place dress and demeanor, team work, work place safety and even marketing. All of this can be achieved successfully, and when “learning moments” occur and assistance is needed, it can be

provided through a collegial relationship without conflict.

Turn Around Café Young Adult Work Force Development curriculum materials and strategies were chosen to engage, excite and ensure success for those prone to self-directed failure and defeat. Additionally, the program strongly adheres to the principles of Social Learning Theory which endorses that people readily learn from one another, through observation, imitation and modeling. The group team relationship building process uses the “forming, storming, norming and performing” elements designed to build positive relationships through experiences and across cultural and other diverse barriers through group processing of communication, problem solving, planning, personal awareness and leadership skills.

The EDGE model (explain, demonstrate, guide and enable) provides an individual, self-paced experience for successful learning that naturally leads the participant into preparation to train others after they have mastered a task.

TURN AROUND CAFE EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCE HANDS-ON WORK SKILL TRAINING SPECIFIC TO A BUSY COFFEE SHOP THAT PROMOTES TEAM WORK AND COLLABORATION

Turn Around Café employees experience hands-on work skill training specific to a busy coffee shop that promotes team work and collaboration. Activities and discussions have graduated from soft skills for interviewing and application completion, meeting with Human Resources to understand work place policies and purpose, to daily opening and closing preparation, customer delivery, maintenance of work space, problem solving, handling money in the work place, financial structuring, and the value of product knowledge.

The Turn Around Café began as a cart operation serving Cadillac brand coffee between late morning and early afternoon

hours. The fledgling baristas were learning all they could about coffee history, beans, and grinds and consistent brewing. Tea and hot chocolate were added when our partnership with Lakeshore Building yielded a small space on the first floor. After a very soft opening and expanding hours to open at 8 a.m., the young entrepreneur spirit took off when decisions about layout, plumbing and electric infrastructure, and paint were followed by the addition of baked goods, snacks and cold drinks.

Wi-Fi installation lead us to the Loyverse POS (point of sale) system enhancing order processing, cash and credit sales and inventory tracking to a professional level. Having added local Urban Farming salads and fruit, a soup of the day, grilled cheese and hot dogs has expanded skills and the menu offerings beyond coffee and snacks.

Once the young adult had been employed for a few weeks and has a payroll check, the addition of mentoring “my money” planning allows for the individual to open a bank account rather than pay \$5 or more to cash a check and budgeting

for transportation and personal needs. Recognizing that managing one’s income is important to maintaining employment as well as time management skills to support other obligations such as high school completion or short term goals around responsibility to the job makes measurable achievement possible.

The networking via the daily work at the Café in a professional community allows the youth to maintain a personal work/learning schedule and to see the opportunity that more education can provide as they desire to advance from coffee barista to other preferred jobs. As they network with the professionals and working citizens who engage with them

(over purchased coffee and snacks), the youth are exploring and thinking about life sustaining strategies and the way to make them a reality.

Young workers have taken their skills and training successfully into the community to work in other service industry businesses including retail and food services. Others have been recruited directly from the Café to take coveted full-time jobs in the city after being observed as timely, hardworking and having positive work ethic. None have made choices that lead back to incarceration or posed risk to the community because they feel a sense of belonging.

The growing process is intensive and focused. The young people appreciate being busy and the new experience of thinking out loud, making plans, seeing the plans to fruition and creating new plans. Mental health and physical health improve as the youth have a new self-structured day and insight for the “next step.” The program is small so as to make the individual success large, meaningful and personal. Relationships, support and a collegial environment create a new self-concept that doesn’t take the young person’s identity away but helps each individual to grow at their own rate and store daily successes in their emotional bank.

Turn Around Café continues to seek partnerships in funding for training, sales, marketing and business management as we intend to become a self-sustaining program that can be replicated in the near future.

**I** INFO

For more information, visit [facebook.com/theturnaroundcafe](https://facebook.com/theturnaroundcafe).  
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