

Please describe the supports the Employee Resource Network provides to companies and/or their employees:

Companies join Employer Resource Networks (ERNs) to help their employees' overcome barriers in their work and personal lives that can affect job performance or retention. ERNs provide a dedicated, onsite Success Coach to work with each company, coordinating with HR personnel as needed and offering confidential support for individuals and their families. The Success Coach provides ongoing assistance and ensures employees find the right support from community resources, government agencies, social service providers, etc. without having to navigate these resources on their own. Success Coaches deliver guidance toward the most appropriate programs depending on each employee's unique situation. Success Coaches also work with companies to provide training and advanced education for work-based skills or life skills along with barrier reduction. Services are available to all ERN member employees.

ERNs network across the country to share best practices and ideas that address employee needs and increase company productivity. Relevant topics are identified, and materials are shared and discussed in bi-monthly meetings where HR professionals learn from each other how best to address trending problems, utilize successful approaches to workplace challenges, and collaborate in their community. HR personnel know that by referring an employee to their Success Coach, people facing crisis get immediate, personal relief. HR staff can focus on other matters, knowing that the employee is in good hands and their needs are going to be addressed confidentially.

ERNs and Success Coaches support HR staff and employees to reduce barriers to employment and improve the lives of the employees and their communities. Companies that utilize the ERN model benefit from improved employee performance, increased job satisfaction and employee retention, and stronger support for HR personnel.

Please describe a challenge an employer was having with their employees, or an employee was having with their employer:

The Success Coach works closely with HR personnel to address a host of challenges that affect workplace performance. Common problems like absenteeism or tardiness are often symptoms of challenges in an employee's personal life. When supervisors or HR personnel recognize that an employee is demonstrating problematic work performance issues, a quick referral to the Success Coach opens the door for help that goes far beyond the work performance issues. Barriers like lack of transportation, lack of childcare, unstable housing, domestic problems, mental health problems, financial mismanagement, confusion working with government agencies, legal issues, substance use, etc. can all be discussed confidentially, and assistance can be provided. The employee and Success Coach develop a relationship based on trust and respect, and over time employees can overcome life's most difficult barriers.

Example: an employee had been falling asleep during their shift, and a concerned supervisor included in a write-up a directive to call the Success Coach for help. The employee was initially reluctant, viewing this as intrusive and punitive, but after speaking with their Coach and realizing that the help was confidential, ongoing and free, they quickly described a series of problems facing their family and affecting their ability to sleep. The Coach was able to work with the employee to address a lack of reliable transportation by seeking community funds from partnering agencies. With the extra funds, the employee was able to repair their car and avoid lengthy bus rides to and from work. Additionally, the employee was then able to drive to different food distribution centers to receive additional food for their family. The Success Coach worked with the employee to address an ongoing debt issue that affected their credit and made it difficult to get approved for a better residence. Over the course of a year, the employee had successfully reduced barriers in their life that prevented the family from thriving.

Please describe any context or historical information the reader should know to better understand the issue/challenge:

People living in the ALICE population make impossible choices every day. When a problem presents itself that cannot be immediately addressed, it causes a cascade of related problems that quickly become insurmountable. A family can experience a blown transmission that results in a costly auto repair bill that reduces their funds reserved for food and rent. Family stability is in constant jeopardy.

During 2020, this vulnerability was drawn in stark relief. Employee stability at risk due to COVID-related issues. COVID resulted in countless compounding barriers: childcare center closures, limited bus routes and reduced hours, losses in earnings, massive reductions in available rentals, increases in rent, increases in workloads, increased vulnerability to health problems, cessations in social services, public assistance office closures, school closures, food insecurity, etc. Families were overworked, worried, and left with few options.

Families also experienced severe stress due to COVID-related loss. Workers were stressed at home and at work. People feared for the safety of themselves and their families but needed to continue earning to support the very basic functions of life. Mental health concerns were prominent driver for calls to the Success Coaches. Many social service providers were overburdened, and services were stretched thin and delayed. The impact on families living in the ALICE population was devastating, and we expect residual problems stemming from the lack of stability during this time to continue for years.

Please describe the solution and the impact that was created with ERN support and the company/employee partnership:

There is no summary that can adequately describe the impact Success Coaches and ERN member companies had on their employees from the ALICE population. Every day, each Success Coach

receive requests from employees seeking assistance for every barrier we can imagine, from mental health care to elder care, from childcare to transportation, from increases in substance use and incarceration to paying for funeral expenses and filing for underemployment relief. Each person who reached out to their HR department or Success Coach came for different reasons, but all were primarily driven by a lack of funds for emerging problems.

As companies struggled with enormously complex problems, HR departments and Success Coaches worked together to support workplace stability and employee retention. Solutions varied and were creative, always with the employee in mind and aiming to positively impact the stability of vulnerable families and support a community at risk.

To learn more:

<https://www.michiganworkssouthwest.org/employers/employer-resource-network/>

www.ern-mi.com

www.ern-usa.com