



# Racine, WI

## Workforce & Employment

### KEY OUTCOMES

#### Long-term

Improve the ability for residents to **earn family-sustaining incomes** and to move into **high-mobility careers**.

#### Short-term

Increase **enrollment in the YWCA SE's High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED)** program; while maintaining or increasing the **graduation rate** (currently about 80%); increase **enrollment in vocational training or post-secondary education** after graduation from the YWCA SE's HSED program.

### BARRIERS

- Low levels of high-school diploma attainment restrict access to workforce training opportunities and family-sustaining wages.
- YWCA SE HSED program participants often have had negative experiences with traditional education.
- Program participants often have trauma, mental health issues, a lack of soft skills, and caregiving responsibilities.
- Structural barriers that accompany poverty (e.g. issues with housing, transportation, and childcare) can make attending the program difficult.
- Many HSED program participants and potential participants are working and must balance the (unpaid) HSED program with often inflexible work hours.
- It is difficult to navigate and understand the landscape of employment and vocational training opportunities in Racine.
- The YWCA SE WI has developed a successful and effective HSED curriculum for high-barrier participants, but lacks funding to scale or sustain the program. Other partners, particularly Gateway Technical College & the Racine Unified School District, have access to state drawdowns for HSED program graduates, but have not previously been engaged to grow this program.

### INTERVENTION

Work with the City, the Racine Unified School District, Gateway Technical College, Racine County, and the YWCA Southeast Wisconsin to: 1) identify and implement new strategies for **recruitment into the program from target populations**; 2) **leverage community partnerships** to scale the program from roughly 40 graduates per year to nearly 500 graduates per year; 3) **add career supports** such as 1-to-1 career counseling, employer site visits, and interview practice to improve connections after graduation into continued education, training, or job placement.

ALIGNMENT TO FIVE CRITERIA



**Evidence base**

This intervention builds on evidence in three important ways. First, the program supplements typical High School and GED content (math, reading, writing, etc.) with “soft skills” training and practice. Such skills as communication, emotional management, and punctuality are both included as a section in the curriculum, and are required in the course itself. For instance, unlike a GED prep course, the HSED requires regular attendance in order for students to pass, thereby providing practice with punctuality and regular attendance. Second, the new outreach and recruitment strategies will be informed by evidence on referral-based marketing programs, taking into account considerations from Idea Couture’s qualitative research labs. Third, the career supports and “pathways onward” intervention to improve connections after graduation will be informed by the career pathways literature and advice from recognized national experts. Here again we are taking into account input from students and program alumni obtained during the Idea Couture research labs.



**Mayoral priorities**

Racine has led the state in unemployment for three decades. Getting Racine residents into stable, family-sustaining employment is a mayoral priority. Over 9,000 residents of Racine do not have a high school diploma, meaning they cannot take advantage of the many workforce training opportunities on offer in the city and they are shut out of higher paying existing jobs in the community. Currently, the YWCA SE’s HSED program is graduating fewer than 50 students a year, meaning it will take more than 90 years for all the residents of Racine to get a high school diploma. The Mayor wants to significantly increase the scope of the HSED program to dramatically reduce the number of Racine residents without an HSED and dramatically increase enrollments into post-secondary training and higher-paying employment.



**Scalability**

Residents of other U.S. cities are unable to access vocational training opportunities and/or family-sustaining wages because they do not hold a high school diploma. This intervention could help to inform the design of other cities’ HSED, GED and other adult basic education (ABE) programs. This intervention could also help public school districts and technical/community colleges understand how to access sustainable funding streams for similar programs.



**Feasibility**

Would build on the existing YWCA SE HSED program, with an established program staff. Program cohorts currently start every 6-8 weeks, meaning enrollment outcomes can be measured within initiative timelines. Improved connections at graduation would likely need to be piloted with current cohorts as the program lasts 20 weeks.



**Leverage taxpayer resources**

Would draw on existing funding sources available to Gateway Technical College, Racine Unified School District, the County and the YWCA to ensure sustainability.