

**SFY 24 Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio, Inc. (CLUES) Direct Appropriation**

Final Report

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Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
Employment and Training Programs Division

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## SFY 2024 CLUES Equity Direct Appropriation

### Introduction

The 2023 Minnesota Legislature ([https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2023/0/Session+Law/Chapter/53/](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2023/0/Session%2BLaw/Chapter/53/)) appropriated state funds to Communidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES) to “expand culturally tailored programs that address employment and education skill gaps for working parents and underserved youth by providing new job skills training to stimulate higher wages for low-income people, family support systems designed to reduce intergenerational poverty, and youth programming to promote educational advancement and career pathways.” In accordance with the legislative appropriation, fifty percent (50%) of the funding is used for programming targeting the Twin Cities Metro Area, and fifty percent (50%) is used for targeting the greater Minnesota area.

#### Appropriation

This equity appropriation provided a total of $1,000,000 in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024. The Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) is permitted to use five percent of the appropriation to administer the grant, making the amount available to CLUES $950,000.

#### Target Groups

CLUES targets low-income adults and youth ages 16 to 24 who are primarily Latinx or BIPOC and live in the Twin Cities metropolitan region or communities surrounding Austin and Willmar where CLUES operates satellite offices. Participants typically have some work experience, may have lost a job, and are looking for a better paying job. For many, their limited English proficiency poses the greatest barrier to obtaining employment or advancing to higher paid employment. With support from DEED, CLUES now offers an On-Ramp Program with intensive *English for Work* classes to offer these participants extra and more individualized support.

### Summary of Goals and Objectives Presented in the Work Plan

CLUES used its direct appropriations funding to support the expansion of culturally tailored programs that address employment and education skill gaps for working adults and underserved youth. The programs provide new job skills training to stimulate higher wages for low-income people, family support systems designed to reduce intergenerational poverty, and youth programming to promote educational advancement and career pathways. The overall goal is to advance opportunities for job skills training and skill-building resources for Latinx and immigrant communities.

In the past year, education and job skills training in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and in the greater Minnesota communities of Austin and Willmar focused on four high-demand employment sectors that offered career pathways to family-sustaining, livable wage employment in healthcare, bilingual customer service/administrative support, commercial driver’s license (CDL) transportation, and welding.

#### Programming and Performance

Of the 616 youth and adults receiving individual, case managed services, 197 were youth between the ages of 14-24, 106 were adults ages 25-44, and 310 were adults, ages 44 and older. Over three quarters of CLUES’ clients were Hispanic, 50% were economically disadvantaged, half were basic skills deficient and another half were of limited English ability.

Employment and training services and activities provided to these clients included:

* Paid internships, skills training, work experiences,
* English as a Second Language (ESL) education classes,
* Post-secondary career exploration and planning,
* Employment preparation and work readiness training,
* Community involvement, mentoring, and leadership development.

**Youth Technology:** Youth participated in several activities, including FAFSA Walkthrough and application assistance, Financial Empowerment and Education, Mental Health Workshop - Collaboration with CLUES Behavioral Health and a Career Pathways Final Presentation on WIX.  In addition, 18 youth completed the Project Invent Hard Skills training for 8 months, with youth obtaining internships at Best Buy, Accenture, and at CLUES’ internal departments. 9 of these youth had the opportunity to present their prototype of a ticketing system at the ADOBE CC headquarters in San Jose California. Finally, 14 youth completed the Fresh Films filmmaking course and 15 were placed in internships at CLUES, Yellow Tag Studios, and Best Buy Studios in-house productions; the marketing departments at Project Invent; and Learning to Lead at Accenture.

**Best Buy Teen Tech Center (BBTTC):** During SFY 2024, 123 youth attended and participated in activities by completing projects at the Best Buy Teen Tech Center.  The Best Buy Teen Tech Center (BBTTC) continues to support the creativity and technical skills of Latinx youth through drop-in hours, workshops, and special events.  Youth participated in a variety of hard skills and soft skills trainings aimed at equipping them with basic workforce skills sets. The BBTTC continues to support the creativity and technical skills of Latino youth through drop-in hours, workshops, and special events in 2024.

Youth programming also included:

* Access to Transfr VR, an immersive virtual reality tool that allows students to explore various careers in a hands-on environment. This innovative technology gives them a realistic understanding of different vocational paths and what they entail.
* Life skills instruction to equip them with financial literacy, effective communication, problem-solving, and other essential life skills that are crucial for both personal and professional success.
* Hands on robotics instruction and activities, in partnership with Johnson High School, to engage students in STEM learning.
* Best Buy Scholarship program that provides $10,000 per year to senior students. This year, three CLUES students have been awarded scholarships.
* Machine Literacy and Workforce Professionalism instruction using Google Applied Skills
* Certification in Abode Creative Solutions (full suite) and Microsoft Digital Literacy.

**Career Development Training:** In SFY 2024, CLUES participants completed Bridge to Workforce training and sought employment opportunities in several career pathways:

In 2024, CLUES' Trades and Transportation program in the Twin Cities enrolled 28 students, resulting in 8 certificates (with 4 retests), 5 job placements, and ongoing employment support for 5 students. An additional 12 students are currently in another class, with 5 waiting to complete their testing. Our Health Classes had 36 students, with 17 certificates earned, 2 awaiting testing, and 9 students actively engaged in ongoing classes. We secured 4 job placements in the health sector. In Greater Minnesota, our Customer Service program had 17 students, leading to 5 small business ventures and 5 job placements, along with 2 promotions to supervisor roles at Hormel. Our Greater Minnesota Trades and Transportation programs enrolled 48 students, with 14 licenses earned, 10 job placements, 2 promotions, and 6 students currently in the knowledge/theory phase, 6 behind the wheel, and 3 in active job searches. The Carpentry class continues with 7 students following an extended schedule and a new instructor. We are actively working with 24 individuals in our employment pipeline, providing support and guidance as they move toward securing job opportunities.

Additionally, we are conducting follow-ups for students who have already secured employment: 22 are being tracked for 3-month retention, 12 for 6-month retention, and 6 for 12-month retention, ensuring continued support and success in their career paths.

Other vocational training options were provided by CLUES and their training partners Ridgewater College, Riverland College, HeartCert, and a Customer Service and Banking curriculum provided by UnidosUS but taught in-house by CLUES staff and employees from WINGS Financial Services.

**CLUES' Career Development classes** provide students with essential skills for today’s job market, including earning an Accenture certificate, building digital literacy, and pursuing Microsoft certification. Our financial literacy courses also help students with budgeting, credit management, and savings. In addition to these technical skills, students receive personalized support for resumes, cover letters, mock interviews, and job fairs. Application days allow students to apply for jobs with in-class guidance, improving their access to opportunities.

We also offer one-on-one coaching to meet individual needs, especially for clients in crisis mode. Beyond career support, we provide access to food security and transportation assistance. Many students, returning to a classroom after years, balance family and personal challenges, making their journey a significant one. Our team is dedicated to helping them succeed both in and out of the classroom

Performance outcomes show that 175 of individual clients attained work readiness or education goals, 121 enrolled in vocational training, 41 earned an occupational credential or degree, and 38 entered unsubsidized employment, 5 retest, 31 waiting for testing.

**Employer Partnerships:** CLUES has built strong partnerships with several key employment partners, such as Children's MN, M Health Fairview, CSL Plasma, Regions Hospital, and GAF, which have been instrumental in supporting our healthcare students. Additionally, since launching the CDL program in the Twin Cities, CLUES has partnered with MNDOT, Bix Produce, Sherwin Williams, UPS, and Renewal by Andersen to offer mock interviews, hiring fairs, and employment opportunities. These collaborations ensure our programs consistently meet industry standards and provide students with real-world experience.

CLUES continues to foster collaborations with the St. Thomas Dougherty School of Education, McNeilus Trucking & Manufacturing, and Second Harvest Heartland. We're also expanding our employer connections with new partners such as Filmtec (Dupont), MBG Property Management, ADM Milling, Biolyph, Metro Heating and Air, Marsden Services, and FedEx. Through these partnerships, we're providing clients with more opportunities, including mock interviews, job fairs, and application days.

However, with only one employment coach serving all sites, including students, walk-ins, and internal referrals, we are developing new strategies to ensure every client receives the attention they need. One of these strategies is implementing structured application days, where students receive guidance and support in completing job applications, ensuring they are well-prepared for employment opportunities.

Since joining CLUES in June 2023, our employment coach has made remarkable strides in providing critical support to our clients. In his first quarter, he managed to see 23 clients, but by the current quarter, that number has surged to 68, more than doubling his caseload. This significant increase reflects the growing demand for employment services, particularly among walk-in clients who often arrive in crisis mode, urgently needing assistance with job placement. To date in 2024, our employment coach has worked with 207 clients this year alone, offering comprehensive support in areas such as resume development, job applications, and interview preparation. His dedication and ability to adapt to the increasing needs of our community have been vital in helping individuals secure employment and regain stability. The exponential growth in his client base underscores the essential nature of these services and the critical role he plays in addressing the employment needs of our community.

**Post-Secondary Education Partnerships:** Dakota County Technical College; Century, Normandale, Riverland and Ridgewater Community Colleges; Metro State University, UMN, and Saint Benedicts College.

**English as a Second Language (ESL) Services:** During the past year, classes were hosted virtually and served clients from around the state, delivering *English as a Second Language* (ESL) curriculum at three varying levels of difficulty. During 2024, 607 individuals attended online classes and students completed 18,895.75 of class time. More recently, 10 graduates of the ESL program are now in enrolled in post-secondary programs or have obtained employment.

Additional services and learning opportunities included CASAS Steps testing for academic gains, preparation classes for the GED and to prepare to become US citizens, and classes in Northstar Digital Literacy, English for Career Development, English creative writing and pronunciation.

#### Culturally Responsive Support Services

Bilingual navigation services guide participants to develop short- and long-term career plans that are realistic and aligned with their individual skills and interests. CLUES staff work with participants to identify and resolve employment, transportation, childcare, and housing barriers, family violence, and other unique issues affecting participants’ ability to enroll in trainings and obtain and retain employment.

Support services include direct financial supports to help low-income participants access transportation, professional clothing, work tools, and other needs. Participants are encouraged to engage in CLUES’ other economic empowerment services such as financial coaching, homeownership trainings, lending circles, and free tax services. CLUES offers a bi-weekly Canasta Familiar food distribution program for households experiencing food insecurity.

**COVID Impact on Programming**

COVID had little impact on the CUES program other than reduced enrollment in certain programs.

#### Data Elements and Performance Indicators Being Collected and Reported

CLUES submits data to DEED every quarter to document the demographics of participants served, services and activities provided, and outcomes achieved. The data items collected are listed below.

### Grant Outcomes

Demographic and outcome data for the SFY 2024 CLUES Direct Appropriation for individual services, for the period July 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024, is as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **SFY2024 PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS** | **TOTAL** |
| Total individual participants served | 240 |
|  |  |
| Male | 85 |
| Female | 153 |
| Did Not Disclose | 2 |
|  |  |
| Age 14-15 | 1 |
| Age 16-17 | 3 |
| Age 18-19 | 24 |
| Age 20-21 | 16 |
| Age 22 and over | 194 |
|  |  |
| Hispanic/Latinx | 191 |
| American Indian/ Alaskan Native | 4 |
| Asian/ Pacific Islander | 8 |
| Black/African American | 23 |
| White/Not Hispanic | 93 |
|  |  |
| 8th grade and under | 0 |
| 9th grade – 12th grade | 15 |
| High School Graduate / equivalent | 153 |
| Some post-secondary education | 30 |
|  |  |
| Recent Immigrant | 0 |
| Youth from Families Receiving Public Assistance  | 45 |
| Youth Offender | 6 |
| Youth with a Disability | 0 |
| High School Dropout at Enrollment | 0 |
| Basic Skills Deficient | 0 |
| Homeless or Runaway Youth | 3 |
| Not employed at program enrollment | 148 |
| Veteran | 2 |
| Low-income  | 240 |
| Aging out of Foster Care | 0 |
|  |  |
| **PROGRAM SERVICES RECEIVED** | **TOTAL** |
| Job Training or Education Services  | 230 |
| Paid Internships and Work Experience  | 0 |
| Mentoring, Leadership and Community Service | 0 |
| Support Services |  |
| Post-Secondary and Career Exploration, Guidance, and Planning (career counseling) | 223 |
|  |  |
| **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS** | **TOTAL** |
| Attained Work Readiness Goal(s) | 175 |
| Attained Education Goal(s) \*IEP goals  | 132 |
| Received Academic Credit or Service-Learning Credit | 0 |
| Obtained High School Diploma or GED | 0 |
| Remained in School or Drop Out Returned to School | 0 |
| Obtained a Safety Certificate; specify:  | 0 |
| Obtained an Industry-Recognized Credential; specify | 41 |
| Enrolled in Post-Secondary Education | 0 |
| Entered Vocational/Occupational Skills Training; specify | 121 |
| Entered Apprenticeship or Union Pre-Apprenticeship Program; specify | 0 |
| Earned an Occupational Certificate or Degree; specify | 0 |
| Entered Part-Time Employment | 6 |
| Average Wage at Part-Time Employment  | $18.10 |
| Entered Full-Time Employment | 32 |
| Average Wage at Full-Time Employment  | $19.71 |
| Entered Military | 0 |
| Entered Job Search and Unemployed | 23 |
| Not in Job Search and Not in School (Opportunity Youth at Exit) | 0 |
| Completed Program Objective; List program objective: | 41 |
| Exited the Program |  |
| **CUSTOMER SATISFACTION FOR INDIVIDUAL SERVICES -** (Cumulative for the SFY) |  |
| 1. Number of participants rating experience as “Excellent”
 | 21 |
| 1. Number of participants rating experience as “Very Good”
 | 14 |
| 1. Number of participants rating experience as “Average”
 | 6 |
| 1. Number of participants rating experience as “Below Average”
 | 0 |
| 1. Number of participants rating experience as “Poor”
 | 0 |
| 1. Total Number of Surveys Completed
 | 41 |

### Expenditures

### Expended Grant Funds

CLUES has expended 78.5% of **SFY 2024** Direct Appropriation grant funds from July 1, 2023 to August 31, 2024:

| **SFY 2024 Budget Category** | **Amount** |
| --- | --- |
| Administrative costs (up to 10% allowed) |  $74,016.05 |
| Direct Customer Training |  $197,655.34 |
| Direct services | $542,155.12 |
| Support services | $350.00 |
| **Total budget expended through July 31, 2024** | **$814,176.51** |

###

### New Grant Funds

The 2023 Legislature provided a total of $1,000,000 in direct appropriation funds to CLUES for SFY 2025. The Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) is permitted to use five percent of the appropriation to administer the grant, making the amount available to CLUES $950,000. As of the end of August 31, 2024, CLUES has expended $26,328 of its $950,000 SFY 2025 Direct Appropriation grant funds, which began August 2024.

### Success Stories

**J.M.**

J. M., a 40-year-old Latino from Minneapolis, had been diligently working in pasta production. While he took pride in his work, he aspired for more—a career that would offer professional growth and better financial stability to support his wife, son, and daughter.

With the support and assistance of CLUES staff, J.M. joined the Hot Water and Boiler Technician program. From the very beginning, he embraced the opportunity with enthusiasm. The program provided him with the skills and knowledge he needed to excel, and Jose thrived in this new learning environment. After completing the program, J.M. is now eagerly awaiting the state exam to obtain his certification. He is excited about the future and the prospect of starting a new career in a field that promises both personal and professional fulfillment.

J.M. extends his heartfelt thanks to CLUES for setting him on the path to success. He credits the organization for the support and guidance that have been instrumental in his journey towards a brighter future.

**Serge**

Serge is an immigrant from Benin, a West African nation and has been employed for the past 4 years at Austin Minnesota’s Quality Pork Processors plant where he works as a forklift operator making $19.50 an hour.

Serge diligently worked to complete his CLUES *Bridge to Your Future* course, while also being a caregiving parent and working towards his US citizenship. CLUES staff could count on him to always return a text or email and reach out for help when needed. Serge was so happy to share this with staff when he became a United States citizen. However, due to his workload and responsibilities, he missed his deadline to complete his CDL online course just a few days. CLUES staff advocated on his behalf due to his dedication and Serge was able to advance to the next step, registering for Behind the Wheel classes in Austin, MN.

CLUES staff assisted Serge in registering for Behind the Wheel classes in Willmar to continue his CDL education. He passed his Pre-Trip Test, sharing with CLUES staff that he was “focused on his test to get it done well.” Serge surprised the CLUES staff with a text and a picture of his paper Commercial Driver’s License two days later, adding that he is, “so happy to make the staff happy and let them know

they can count on me for anything.” Serge “thanks God, everyone who is part of his CDL story like the CLUES staff and the Ridgewater College Team with a special thanks to (his) instructor, who gave him the entire details about the road test skills that helped me pass the exam one time.” CLUES knows that the employer who hires Serge will not be disappointed and that Serge will be successful in whatever he chooses.

**Jorge**

Jorge was one of CLUES’ first Teen Tech Center’s Clubhouse to Careers (C2C) program participants. His CLUES C2C instructor Greg Romero says, “This young man stepped up, showed up, and took home all he aimed for. When he joined the C2C Pathways program he was living in Albert Lea and was attending the program virtually. He soon found a way to relocate to Lakeville so he could be closer to CLUES and obtain employment to further his goals. He took a position working in food production, baking cookies, so he could move to the city and prepare for his summer internship as part of the C2C Pathways program, which he completed at Accenture. He then applied for a paid STEM apprenticeship at Accenture. They noticed his perseverance, interest, and passion to enter into the STEM field of work and granted him the apprenticeship. Now he's on his way to becoming the full-stack web developer he wants to be.”

**Hailey**

Throughout her life Hailey felt as she if was never good enough due to poverty and depression, which caused financial barriers, a lack of focus, and extra coursework in order to graduate. She knew she needed to make a change and find employment and break out of the cycle. During her search, Hailey called CLUES to register for Riverland Community Colleges’ Customer Service and Banking course. She worked hard to complete the 10-week course with the help of her CLUES Navigator who encouraged her to “keep going” and “keep pushing” at times when she wanted to give up.

Hailey learned a lot about professionalism – how to dress, how to communicate professionally, interviewing skills. Hailey used to be scared speaking in front of people, but she said, “they (CLUES) taught me to overcome that. Now I’m more open.” Hailey has also learned how to handle different situations and has gained wisdom and knowledge in areas that she didn’t know she had, including seeing different points of view and working with others. This helped her be truly happy with herself.

Hailey got a job offer as a PCA supervising a group of people for an Austin senior center and is thriving and using all the tools she learned through the CLUES program.

**Ismael**

Ismael, a 22-year-old Latino man living in Savage, embarked on a workforce journey that would reshape his professional work career. When he joined the Healthcare Technology Services program offered at CLUES in June of 2023, Ismael was working at a factory, aspiring for a better career that would grow his career professionally and better support for his family.

Ismael enthusiastically embraced the opportunities presented by CLUES programming. Through dedication and hard work, he successfully completed the Healthcare Technology Services program, earned a valuable certification, and secured a position with Care4All, a partner organization of CLUES. This achievement marked not just a job placement but a significant step forward in his career, as he entered the healthcare field—a domain he had aspired to join.

CLUES not only equipped Ismael with the skills and knowledge needed for success in the healthcare sector but also facilitated connections with organizations like Care4All. Today, Ismael stands as a testament to the transformative power of education and mentorship. He has expressed his heartfelt gratitude to CLUES staff for providing him with the necessary support, guidance, and resources to be successful on his journey from the factory floor to a rewarding career in healthcare.

**New Work Preparation Classes at CLUES**

In 2023, CLUES introduced new work readiness classes designed to be highly interactive and hands-on, providing students with a more familiar and engaging learning experience. The in-person classes create a more accessible environment for students and facilitate greater access to CLUES services. Instructor Nathan Fowler assisted 72 clients last year in sessions that provided basic employment skills training and assisted in active job searches and applications. Nathan also dedicated time to work with other employment program students, handling data tracking and entry tasks, and conducting outreach activities. During his tenure, Nathan successfully helped 15 participants secure employment with Fantastic Cleaning, New Horizons, Twin City Demo, and more.

**COABE Teacher of the Year**

CLUES teacher, Adriana Galvan, has been teaching Digital Literacy classes at CLUES since 2019, and was recently selected as the 2023 COABE (Coalition on Adult Basic Education) Teacher of The Year! After spending most of her adult life championing and supporting the Adult Education industry, Adriana has spent the last five years mentoring and instructing CLUES students.