

Goal of new grant is to get 40 local people off welfare

Courtney Day, Reporter 8:50 p.m. EDT June 10, 2016

MANSFIELD - Richland County Healthier Buckeye Council was selected to receive a nearly \$750,000 state grant to help individuals in the community overcome barriers to self-sufficiency.

The grant will be used to attempt to help up to 40 people who currently are unemployed or underemployed and receiving government assistance to become employed in a living wage job within a year, Richland Community Development Group Workforce Development Coordinator Karen Seaman said.

The local council was among 21 councils or groups of councils in the state to receive funding in the first round of the Healthier Buckeye Grant Pilot Program and will receive \$749,163 - just shy of the \$750,000 cap for the grant. The funding was created as part of the state's 2014 Mid-Biennium Review and is distributed through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

Healthier Buckeye Councils are designed to encourage collaboration between businesses, social service agencies, healthcare providers, service recipients, schools and other groups in order to assist low-income families in moving up and out of poverty.

Richland County Healthier Buckeye Council is a collaboration of the Richland County Youth and Family Council, Job and Family Services, Mansfield City Schools Adult Basic and Literacy Education, North Central State College, Madison Adult Career Center, Richland Community Development Group, Richland County Transit Board, Catholic Charities and Catalyst Life Services.

The council has identified four training pathways to jobs it believes grant program participants could obtain to earn a sustainable wage within the Richland County Community. The four areas are CNC operator, welder, social service provider and medical assistant.

Community partners involved in the grant project will work together to utilize existing resources to support individuals as they navigate the training pathways. Grant money will be used to pay program staff and to meet the additional needs of program participants, such as paying for transportation costs or childcare.

Grant money will also be used to offer mentor stipends, and employers who hire program participants will be asked to provide one-on-one mentorship for the new hires to aid in job retention.

The funding will also help establish a resource bank through which participants could receive no-interest short-term "loans" for emergencies.

Richland County Youth and Family Council executive director Teresa Alt said she and the other partners in the grant program are hoping to create a smoother transition for people getting off government assistance by addressing the barriers low-income community members often face.

She said the grant ties into the efforts of many area social service agencies to put employment first, based on findings that employment is good for individuals' mental and physical health as well as for the community.

"We found this opportunity to be perfect timing and a perfect structure for what we are trying to do, and we already had the infrastructure in place," she said. "This is truly a group effort to get the unemployed or underemployed in our community back into the workforce."

The grant funding period will begin July 1, 2016 and continue through June 30, 2017.