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New program targets people 16-24 with limited skills

Aug 20 2008

Five local organizations are joining together to help young adults who have limited basic skills. Through a shared project called the Eastside Educational Transition Center, Bellevue and Cascadia community colleges, Hopelink, and Lake Washington and Renton technical colleges are working to help under-educated young adults get the job training they need to become economically self-sufficient.

Funded by a grant from the Workforce Development Council of King County, the center will work specifically with people age 16-24 who live along the I- 405 corridor from Bothell to Renton.

“There are hundreds of young people in East King County who have dropped out of high school and, as a result, lack the skills they need to land high wage/high demand jobs,” said Patricia Chou, the center’s project director. “They often wind up dependent on their parents and society for support, and are highly susceptible to unemployment during hard economic times.”

The Eastside Educational Transition Center aims to help these young people obtain the job-training they need to eventually become economically self-sufficient.

“Many services work with school districts to encourage students to stay in school, but once students actually drop out it is very difficult to find them again and help them get back into school,” Chou said. “Our program is unique because we will give those who have fallen through the cracks a second chance at education.

“And instead of saying they have to go back to high school to finish, or get a GED, we offer an alternative option - earning college credits and certificates at one of our member organizations,” Chou said.

“Our students will train specifically for jobs that are in demand, such as nursing assistant, IT support specialist and automotive general-service technician.”

Because employers today need workers with basic math and literacy skills, in addition to the specific skills for the job, the new center will guide students into their members’ I-BEST programs, which teach basic education and job skills simultaneously. (I-BEST stands for Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training.)

I-BEST programs are designed to prepare students for an entry-level job in one year or less, so they can move quickly into employment to begin earning a higher income and, equally important, gain work experience. The academic credits earned in I-BEST also help students qualify for more advanced certificate and degree programs in their field.

By giving each student individual attention, Chou said, students will be helped to map out advantageous career pathways, based on current labor-market conditions and trends.

The center itself is looking for help, too - from employers,

community organizations and individual citizens.

“We want to engage other Eastside organizations and employers in sharing ideas and resources with us,” said Chou, “and we hope everyone will encourage under-educated youth around them to stay in or go back to school.”

For more information about entering the program or to discuss how your organization can lend support, contact Patricia Chou at 425-564-3079 or pchou@bcc.ctc.edu.