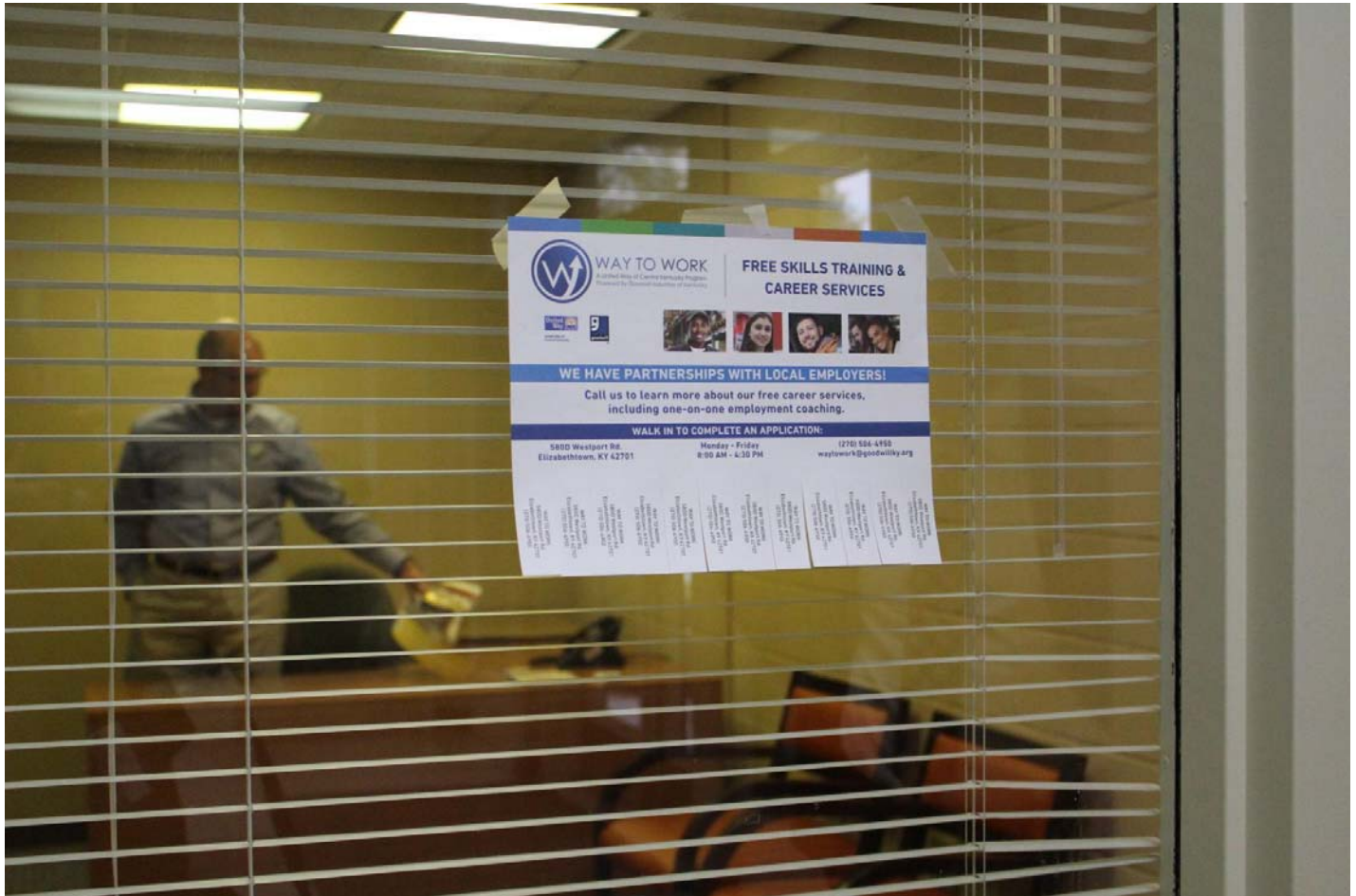


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## United Way, Goodwill launch Way to Work

KATHERINE KNOTT The News-Enterprise 11 hrs ago



A new job training and coaching program officially has begun in Hardin County.

Way to Work launched last week and is screening job seekers at its Westport Road office. United Way of Central Kentucky and Goodwill Industries of Kentucky teamed up to start the training program, which focuses on helping residents find a job, retain the job and become self-sufficient.

Cole Whobrey, vice president of the local United Way chapter, said the region has a workforce crisis with more than one-third of Hardin County residents not engaged, meaning they aren't employed or looking for work.

Whobrey said that crisis will need to be addressed if the area is going to improve. Way to Work is one way to tackle that problem and help its participants overcome barriers to work.

“This is a huge, untapped potential for our community,” Whobrey said.

Way to Work is modeled after Cincinnati Works, a nonprofit that aims to eliminate poverty, and staff have set a goal of helping 50 residents in the first year.

United Way announced the program last September during a Hardin County Chamber of Commerce luncheon. Today, United Way kicks off its annual giving campaign at the monthly luncheon.

Last week’s launch was more than two years in the making. United Way and Goodwill staff had to find office space, hire staff and train them, and develop partnerships with area employers.

The Way to Work office is at 580D Westport Road in Elizabethtown in the basement of the Hardin County Health Center. Whobrey said it will grow into the space, which is off Saint John Road and the U.S. 31W Bypass.

Scott Conway, CEO of Magnolia Bank and a United Way board member, said they were ready to get the program off the ground and start coaching.

“United Way had decided to try something different in terms of addressing poverty and moving people into self-sufficiency,” he said.

Each job seeker, or member, in the program will have a coach who can help them work through issues and overcome barriers as they arise.

“(Coaches) are walking along that path with them,” said T.J. Shockley-Hunt, regional manager of career services for Goodwill.

Right now, Way to Work staff members are working to find program participants. They will screen residents to determine if they meet acceptance criteria.

“We’re blanketing the city and working hard on recruiting,” Shockley-Hunt said.

Conway said, according to Cincinnati Works, the biggest challenge will be funding and recruiting the right job-seekers. He was told they might have to screen 250 people to find 50 qualified candidates.

Way to Work members are members for life, Conway said. Moving someone from poverty into self-sufficiency could take six to eight years and cost about \$30,000. The social services for a family living in poverty costs about \$30,000 annually, according to United Way estimates.

“It’s a process,” Conway said.

Members must be at least 18 years of age, authorized to work in the United States, committed to full-time work and have stable living arrangements, which includes halfway houses with proven stability.

To qualify for the free career services, members also must have a household income less than 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.

Those accepted will go through a week-long job readiness training and complete the Goodwill Soft Skills Academy. After that, Shockley-Hunt said they will be placed in a job depending on results of a drug test and a background check.

Job training classes start Sept. 24, Shockley-Hunt said.

According to the acceptance criteria, residents with criminal histories will be accepted. Those with sexual offenses might be accepted on a case-by-case basis.

Way to Work has partnered with several employers, and officials are looking for more.

Shockley-Hunt said they are working with employers from across the sectors, so they can find the best fit for their members.

“We want what’s best for members,” she said. “We don’t want to do any harm. We want to put them in the best position for success.”

Whobrey said those who are interested in becoming an employer-partner should reach out to Way to Work in addition to those looking for a job.

Walk-ins are welcome at Way to Work. The entrance is at the back of the building. The office is open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

For information, call 270-506-4950 or email [waytowork@goodwillky.org](mailto:waytowork@goodwillky.org).

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