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LCCC gets grant to help at-risk students

By KATHIE BASSETT The Telegraph |



Jenny Scoggins and Brandon Denham, previous students in Lewis and Clark Community College's YouthBuild program, work to renovate a house, which later became a home awarded to a Habitat for Humanity family in 2011.

GODFREY - A federal grant will enable a local college to serve more at-risk students in a comprehensive alternative education program that literally builds futures.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., announced Thursday that the U.S. Department of Labor has awarded a \$1.1 million YouthBuild grant to Lewis and Clark Community College.

"This is such a positive," Director of Adult Education Val Harris said. "The grant means that we get to take a Cadillac approach to education that will involve effective basic skill instruction contextualized initially within the building trades."

YouthBuild grants help out-of-school youth aged 16 to 24 earn a high school or General Educational Development diploma while learning critical occupational skills in construction, health care, information technology and other fields.

Many participants have been in the juvenile justice system, are aging out of foster care, have dropped out of high school, or are otherwise at risk of failing to reach key educational milestones and opportunities that lead to career fulfillment.

The grant awarded to LCCC, a previous participant in the program, is just one of five awarded in the state, totaling \$5,127,556. Ranging from \$700,000 to \$1.1 million each, the Department of Labor will fund 74 YouthBuild programs in 28 states and the District of Columbia, totaling \$75 million in grants.

"Providing alternative education opportunities for at-risk youth is a win-win situation," said U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello, D-Belleville. "We invest in our young people, who learn valuable job skills that enable them to strengthen the economic development of our region."

The YouthBuild program offers young people the opportunity to earn academic and industry-recognized credentials, practice the skills they'll need to succeed at work, and participate in their own growth by building leadership skills that they will use for the community's good, Harris explained.

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Southwestern Illinois Joint Apprenticeship Program, among other agencies.

"Our goal is to build a house per year for low-income families," Harris said. "The idea is that while students are reading technical materials, they are building the skills to pass the G.E.D. exam in the context of the construction trade and learning about their own potential."

The program will start in January 2013 with a target of enrolling 16 students per semester in the one-year program. The curriculum will involve four days of instruction, running from 8:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m., along with a follow-up year.

The grant allows sufficient support to cover two years of instruction plus a final follow-up year for approximately 64 students.

After a three-week orientation, the emphasis will be to provide students with the skills necessary to pass the G.E.D. exam during their first semester and then to bridge them into college courses based on their interests in their second semester, Harris said.

"We're working on a lot of cool things, such as bridge programs into the health care and technology field," she explained. "While some students choose to stay in construction, we also offer capstone programs in welding, automotive and emergency medical training."

The college plans to partner with the Alton Area Habitat for Humanity, Madison County Employment and Training Department, the Alton School District, the Alton Housing Authority, the city of Alton, Madison County Community Development and

The program is based on a model created by Harlem resident Dorothy Stoneman, who noted that young people and the homeless congregated on the same street corner. Her vision, Harris said, was to mobilize the youth to help others and, in the process, help themselves.

"Students who complete the program create an internal change for the better and then apply it outward, which positively impacts their communities," LCCC President Dale Chapman said. "This project will continue to foster the development of leaders who will be empowered to physically create positive change in their own communities while bettering themselves and the lives of their families."

For more information about the program, call (618) 468-4100.