

New location helps R.I. center expand job training

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From almost the first day Family Resources Community Action in Woonsocket launched its employment training services 15 years ago, the program had been bursting at the seams.

At one point, clients who were seeking help getting a job were piling into a room at a homeless shelter "barely bigger than a closet," recalled Nancy Paradee, deputy executive director of Family Resources, a nonprofit, family-support agency. "It's almost laughable now."

For a youth portion of the employ-

ment program, teens were relegated to the basement, which required them to climb down a narrow, winding set of stairs.

Now the Family Resources Employment and Training Center has hit it big, in a way.

The center recently moved into a more spacious location at 55 Main St. in downtown Woonsocket. A 4,000-square-foot storefront has allowed Family Resources to expand its job-training programs. Such services are in great demand in northern Rhode Island, agency leaders say, because much of the economy was once so dependent on now-shuttered mills.

"We have a very low-skilled group of people," said Paradee. "Many of them want to work but the manufacturing base is gone, and they don't have the skills that today's marketplace requires."

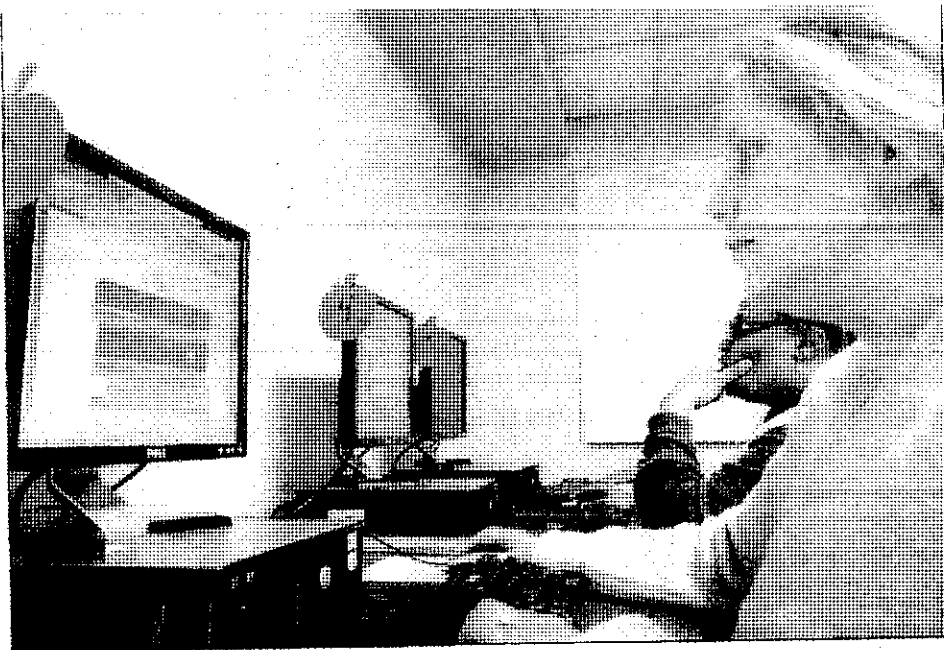
With the move to a bigger, more visible location, Family Resources has doubled the size of the center's staff to 12. And the center has added two new programs: Basic business and commerce training is a 60-hour course that teaches basic record-keeping and computing skills. For those aged 14-21, there's a drop-in center where they can research careers, listen to guest speakers and participate in workshops.

In addition, the Family Resources Employment Center is the headquarters for the Woonsocket Employment Network, a collaboration of several agencies and local businesses, such as Woonsocket-based CVS Caremark Corp.

The network, one of four such collaborations in the state funded by the United Way's Skill Up Rhode Island program, focuses on the needs of both the people seeking training and the employers who need trained workers.

The Woonsocket Employment Network -- which has received \$125,000 from Skill Up RI so far -- is currently training

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MICHELLE COBB works on a graph she has created as a student in the Family Resources Employment Training Program, in Woonsocket. Linda Mangum is in the background.



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TAISHA DIAZ, foreground, works with Shannon Hagedorn, a youth-services coordinator at Project Impact, to write a resume. Diaz is working on her GED.

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people to work in a CVS distribution center, but the network is still looking to get more employers involved. "We can help them develop a training program to meet whatever their needs are," Paradee said.

Other adult training programs include courses on medical billing and coding, career and computer skills, and certified nursing-assistant training. The center is also becoming a site where people can take certification tests for certain software, such as Microsoft Word.

Kerri Kanelos, director of the employment center, figured the staff has provided assistance to more than 350 people since moving to the bigger location two months ago. And the numbers will only grow from there, she said.

Family Resources is one of eight community-action programs in the state, and the only one in northern Rhode Island. While other agencies in the Blackstone Valley offer some job training, Kanelos and Paradee said Family Resource is unique in that it offers much more to those who seek employment help.

Clients might receive appropriate clothing for job interviews, or assistance in dealing with utility shutoffs or pending evictions. And they are eligible for family counseling.

"When you come into the training program, you not only get the employment services, you get the services of the whole agency," Paradee said.

One of the more popular features of the employment center is the In-School Youth Employment, a two-year program that provides those aged 14-18 a six-week summer internship at local businesses and nonprofit organizations.

But it doesn't end there. During the following school year, the center offers homework assistance and life-skills workshops. Center staff members then continue to monitor the youngsters for another year.

"The main goal of the program is for these kids to

stay in school, and to ensure that they have a goal for what they want to do when they graduate," Kanelos said.

The agency typically receives 150 to 200 applications for the youth-employment programs annually. Now that the center has a bigger location, most of those youngsters won't be turned away, as they have been in the past, Kanelos said. ■

'When you come into the training program ... you get the services of the whole agency.'

NANCY PARADEE

Family Resources deputy executive director