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MIGHT ready to launch new workforce training program

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MIGHT Community Development & Resource Center is ready to launch a new program designed to open opportunities for low-income residents who are unemployed or under-employed.

MIGHT is launching a \$6.1 million workforce development program this month that will be funded over a five-year period by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services as part of the Work Ready Oklahoma program. The program will offer workshops and training to low-income individuals and families, the historically unemployed or underemployed, low-skilled workers, and those with a criminal background, according to its definition.

Lawton Program Director Bernita Taylor said the program is a perfect fit for MIGHT, which already has collaborative relationships in place to help the community's under-served residents. That's why MIGHT is interested in the new work program.

"This provides hope and opportunities for our low-income," Taylor said, of the opportunity to help Lawton's underserved residents become career ready.

Taylor said the hope is such individuals can be introduced to companies that can provide them employment, with salaries and benefits at a sustainable level — meaning, enough to support a family. And she's excited by the fact that MIGHT's new mission will fit squarely into something noted economist Mark Snead told city leaders at last week's Mayor's Economic Summit: one of the top things Lawton must address is the fact it has a higher-than-average number of people in the labor pool who could work, but don't.

"It fits," she said, adding that is why MIGHT was one of the summit's sponsors. "We hope to serve that large population of available labor pool."

The fact MIGHT already is working with that population was a major point in its favor as it went through the DHS application process to find a rural setting in Southwest Oklahoma to operate what will be the first program of its kind in this area of the state. Taylor said DHS wanted rural counties, ultimately planning for 17 Work Ready Oklahoma sites across the state.

DHS said Work Ready Oklahoma has been successfully operating in the Oklahoma City area for eight years, before expanding to McIntosh, Muskogee and Pittsburg counties in 2022. In those rural areas, the programs placed 164 individuals in jobs in its first year, generating an estimated \$6 million in annual wages.

Taylor said that potential is what she likes best about the program.

"It's an avenue of hope for those who are under-employed and in our community," she said. "And, those who are unemployed, it gives them another avenue to be career ready, in order to make themselves more marketable."

The employment center will provide co-working space and ongoing coaching and support for remote workers, along with training and employment initiatives to prepare participants for careers. Services will be offered at no charge.

More Information

Work Ready Lawton's priorities:

- Equipping vulnerable Oklahomans with information, coaching and connections for self-sufficiency.
- Assisting low-income Oklahomans in finding and maintaining consistent, gainful employment within the community.
- Establishing connections between Oklahomans and a network of livable-wage job opportunities, both virtually and through local partnerships.
- Providing access to training programs and employment initiatives to enhance self-sufficiency and promote stable, healthy families.
- Collaborating to ensure resources from SNAP Employment & Training programs, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs and other funded employment programs are available to low-income families.

More Information

Work Ready Oklahoma, coordinated by MIGHT Community Development and Resource Center:

\$6.1 million initiative funded by the Department of Human Services to provide training to low-income unemployed and under-employed.

Ribbon cutting for new facility planned for Sept. 6 at the center's location, 2 SE Lee Boulevard (the old Great Plains Improvement Foundation Office).

Recruitment will begin this month. The first informational session for registered participants will be Sept. 13, with the first workshops set for Sept. 16.

The program's goal is to serve at least 75 community members in the first year.

The program will be led by Program Director Bernita Taylor, Program Manager Monique Reese, and job coaches Amber Guest and Tanna Vu with administrative support from Brooke Brown.

Information is available at www.workreadyoklahoma.com or through MIGHT: Tanna Vu at tanna@wro-lawton.com or (580) 284-3398.