

Franklin Hampshire Career Center offers resources for teens as well as older workers seeking jobs

By CHRIS LINDAHL

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NORTHAMPTON — Whether for a teenager trying to find a first job or an older person looking to make a career switch, the Franklin Hampshire Career Center offers free services and an entry to other career-training opportunities.

“I always tell them it’s like a journey,” said Jim Parcels, director of planning and youth programs for the center which has an office at 178 Industrial Drive in Northampton.

Parcels said young people looking to explore career options need to assess their skills and interests.

“It’s best to have a job that doesn’t even seem like a job,” he said.

The center offers “career interest inventories” that help clients narrow down what jobs might be best suited for their abilities and interests.

Parcels said after figuring out career paths that may be of interest, it is vital to speak to people in those jobs.

“I think you truly need to talk to people that are doing the job and find out what they do and find out from them how they got to where they are,” he said. “Are you going to like the journey?”

For example, take the hundreds of possible health careers which range from working directly with patients to others behind the scenes, all with varying levels of educational requirements.

And for people interested in becoming a physician, for example, there’s often a “reality check,” Parcels said. “Do you have the money or can you get loans for hundreds of thousands of dollars and spend 10 or 12 years in school before you get that job?”

The state and federal governments offer grants and loans to those applying to institutions of higher education through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

In addition, many institutions offer need- and merit-based financial aid.

The MassTransfer program allows students who aim to complete a bachelor’s degree to start their education at a community college and finish it at a state university.

That means that students can save money by attending four semesters at community college, which cost an average of \$5,261 for two semesters, and four semesters at the University of Massachusetts or another state university, which cost \$12,618 and \$8,681, respectively.

Finding a new job

The Franklin Hampshire Career Center also offers a wealth of opportunities for those looking to change careers or who are out of work.

For those who have been laid off, the need to find a career that suits them is often critical because they have family obligations.

People who receive unemployment benefits are required by law to attend programs at the career center to assist them in their job searches, Parcels said.

The center offers workshops and seminars on creating resumes, cover letters and networking.

The center can connect out-of-work people with training programs, which sometimes can be paid for with federal grant money.

“We do a lot of trainings in the health careers because there’s a lot of job opportunities in the health field in this area,” Parcels said.

Holyoke Community College offers programs in medical assistant and billing certificates, and Greenfield Community College has programs in medical administration, nursing and paramedic studies.

Other popular options include truck-driving schools, which Parcels said take about four weeks and are “relatively inexpensive.”

Local schools include United Tractor Trailer School in Chicopee and Tri-State CDL Training Center in Springfield.

And though the area’s manufacturing industry has declined, Parcels said there are opportunities in advanced manufacturing — using computerized equipment to manufacture metal.

In manufacturing “there’s fewer people employed, but the skill level that’s needed is higher,” he said. “Some employers themselves have kicked in money to send people to school.”

A nonprofit consortium led by Steve Capshaw, president of Valley Steel Stamp Inc. in Greenfield was formed four years ago with other precision manufacturing companies and banks to raise money to purchase computerized numerical control machines for Franklin County Technical School. Their efforts were bolstered by state funding, according to Andrew Baker, the career center’s special projects and business outreach coordinator.

“It’s now a state-of-the-art machine shop,” he said.

The regional employment board has partnered with Greenfield Community College to offer grant-funded trainings for adults on the machines, Baker said.

The trainings help increase the number of available workers for the precision manufacturing companies.

And the University Without Walls program offered by UMass Amherst is designed for adults to complete their bachelor’s degree through online or on-campus courses and allows students to earn up to 100 credits for prior coursework, training or work and life experiences.

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