

Creative Collaborations Support Transition from Welfare to Work

WELFARE-TO-WORK INITIATIVES require that participants seek education and/or training to help them move into the workforce. In rural areas, however, transportation issues, childcare needs, and other factors can keep people from accessing those services. In Kentucky, collaborative partnerships are helping people solve those problems and get the help they need.



From the front: January Oliver, Sylvia Owens, and Audrey Begley.

Job readiness classes are set up at sites such as the Grant County Adult Education Center in Dry Ridge, where the first series concluded recently.

The Department for Employment Services is involved, so “people have to come,” explains Amy Cloud, director of the Center. “Now, there are consequences for not attending; they won’t get benefits if they don’t participate. It’s just like a job. If they miss classes, they can’t continue.”

Cloud, who taught job readiness in Lexington, KY before coming to Dry Ridge, uses materials gathered over the years and invites speakers from Gateway, the National College of Business, Women’s Crisis Center, and others. She also uses videos and finds KET’s *Workplace Essential Skills* (WES) especially helpful.

In the past, Cloud says she was struggling to find tapes—one here on interviewing, another there on skills. When she heard about the WES series at a conference, she watched some tapes and declared them “fabulous.” “These are great videos,” she says. “I think they’re so wonderful.”

Five women came to Grant County’s first job readiness classes, and three earned a certificate of completion.

“They bonded—traded children’s clothes, car pooled, and went together to gather the 26 job applications required in the course,” she says. After learning basic computer skills, all attended a free Microsoft class. Now, one has a job. The other two are waiting to train in phlebotomy and, meanwhile, are volunteering to hone office skills and earn a recommendation to show potential employers. In addition, two of the three have now earned their GED certificates. The third already had a high school diploma.

“It was wonderful to see,” Cloud says. “It worked as it was supposed to.”

Cloud envisions additional uses for job readiness training and WES.

Early morning and evening sessions, she believes, would benefit some of the Center’s GED students, who also need job skills. In addition, she dreams of speaking to high school seniors just before they graduate about the need for job skills. She envisions a two-week intensive course using the eight WES employment videos and outside speakers. The WES Orientation video could be part of her initial presentation.

Already, the Center works with the Positive Outcome Program (POP), serving teen dropouts or potential dropouts, to provide job readiness training.

Such collaborative action is typical in Grant County.

For example, the area Cooperative Extension Office worked with program participants on nutrition, and the nearby middle school cafeteria also provided the three women in the jobs program with lunch, saving time and expense for the learners.

“That’s the blessing of working in a rural county,” Cloud notes. In rural areas, funding and resources may be limited, so agencies must be creative. They may approach problems from different perspectives, but they’re all working toward the same goals and, often, with the same people.

“We know we have to work together,” she says. “Family resource centers, the health department, hospital, community college and adult education centers—all meet once a month over lunch. Business gets involved, as well. It brings the community together.”

Just a few other Center services include free basic computer classes; opportunities for adults to polish basic writing and

math skills; English as a Second Language for Latino farm workers; and, of course, GED classes.

Since there is only one large classroom at the Center, tapes come in handy here, as well. Some GED students watch videos with headphones and then complete workbook lessons. Others watch KET broadcasts or check out tapes and work at home. At the county jail, the Center also provides teachers and *GED Connection* tapes for prisoners.

In June, GED graduates, adults receiving job skills certificates, and other learners are recognized.

“Some have never had a graduation ceremony in their life,” Cloud notes. “We borrow the high school auditorium and hand out diplomas or certificates.” Last year, the Center also nominated about 10 learners to the National Adult Education Honor Society, and awarded pins and certificates. There was even a drawing for three refurbished home computers. There are caps and gowns, and learners get to keep their tassels, as well as a silk rose. Businesses attend and provide giveaways, and a local company provides sheet cakes and punch.

“We know we have to work together,” she says. “Family resource centers, the health department, hospital, community college and adult education centers—all meet once a month over lunch. Business gets involved, as well. It brings the community together.”

“This is their one big moment to really shine,” Cloud says. “It’s the reward for a process that begins with each learner’s first visit to the Center. The hardest thing that the learners do is to come back, as adults, to a school setting, to walk up and turn our doorknob, but once they get to that point, we can help.” 📖

For more information about *Workplace Essential Skills* and *GED Connection*, visit KET’s Web site at www.ket.org/GED.