

Initiative offers hope to needy families

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GARDNER – With the aid of a local program, six families have been put on the road to financial independence.

These families were honored this week at the RCAP Solutions office in Gardner for successfully graduating from the Moving to Work program, a three-year initiative designed to provide families with resources and abilities that can get them on track to sustaining long-term economic self-sufficiency without having to rely on the aid of state services.

The six participants were awarded checks, totaling \$101,379.65, a direct result of their work over the course of the three-year program.

RCAP Solutions, a Gardner-based nonprofit organization, has been helping low-income families to secure steady employment through the program.

According to Karen A. Koller, president and CEO of RCAP Solutions, the program “has gone a long way in helping individuals and families within the program find their own self sufficiency.”

The program, a Worcester-based project, offers low-income families the chance to secure vital support services needed to gain and maintain gainful employment for individuals and families.

“The program emphasizes getting individuals to build assets, ownership and employment,” said Ms. Koller.

For more than six years, according to Ms. Koller, 500 to 600 families have successfully graduated from the program.

Among the tools that are made available to their clients are an individual case manager to develop a plan tailored to a family or individual’s specific needs, an annual stipend, and, in a unique twist, an escrow account in which the families or individuals involved can place a part of their wages towards

over the course of a three-year period.

Upon completion of the program, the escrow accounts are made accessible to the participants involved, many of whom utilize the money to put money toward purchasing homes.

Pam O’Neill, director of Client Services to RCAP, said that the program has generated \$6,380,956 over the last six years for the participants involved, which includes an individual subsidy of \$450 monthly over 3 years, and a minimum of \$50 monthly devoted to the specialized escrow accounts.

“It inspires independence and hope,” said Ms. O’Neill. “These individuals come to us when they’re struggling, and we get them to actualize their full potential.”

Benuda Kanada, one of the program’s six recent graduates, said in a statement that she was now excited about the future.

“Things for me were really rough,” said Ms. Kanada. “This has tremendously changed my life. It really taught me a lot. How to live within my range and also how to grow as a person. I feel this sense of accomplishment and I know I can improve and get even better.”

The program, according to Ms. O’Neill, was given to RCAP Solutions as a pilot program by the state Housing and Urban Development program. It is only one of two in the state of Massachusetts, and only one of 29 similar programs nationwide.

On the subject of whether more projects may appear in more places state or nationwide, Ms. Koller said that officials were ready to implement a similar model of the program across the country.

“What we’re seeing here,” said Ms. Koller, “is the true benefit of several dollars going toward getting people toward the path to self sufficiency, and that’s a true example of our tax dollars at work.”

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