

TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

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Focus is on worker

Fourth of 9 sessions set

By Kathleen A. Shaw, TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

WORCESTER (MA)— Employers, workers, unions and education and training providers from throughout Central Massachusetts will meet at 5:30 p.m. tomorrow at Trinity Lutheran Church, 73 Lancaster St.

They will discuss what keeps workers from reaching self-sufficiency and employers from getting the skilled workers they need to grow and prosper in Massachusetts.

A study done by the Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies shows that more than 22 percent of Central Massachusetts families were not economically self-sufficient in 1999, the year that was studied.

This is the fourth of nine sessions to be held across the state as the Workforce Solutions Group develops ideas to address the “skills gap” and turn those into policy.

“The lack of skills is a challenge for both Massachusetts workers and employers,” said Ted Coghlin, chairman of the Central Massachusetts Regional Employment Board and president of Coghlin Electrical Contractors Inc. “Workers need more skills in order to secure better wages and employers need more skilled workers in order to thrive. This is a shared problem, and the Workforce Solutions Group is building a shared solution,” he said.

In single-parent families, more than 59 percent failed to reach self-sufficiency. These findings were based on the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Standards developed by The Women’s Union to measure what a family needs to “get by” in various regions of the state. Unlike the Federal Poverty Standard, the FESS standard accounts for regional variations in cost of living.

The Rev. Gary Richards, chairman of Worcester Interfaith, said, “Too many families in Central Massachusetts and across the state are simply unable to achieve the promise of becoming economically self-sufficient.

“Economic self-sufficiency cannot be an unattainable dream. Workers, employers and education and training providers must work together to ensure work-force development is a shared priority,” he said.

The study also revealed that 6.8 percent of Worcester County families lived in poverty in 1999. Moreover, 18.2 percent of Worcester County families were “low-income,” living with incomes less than two times the poverty rate. Among female-headed households, that rate skyrocketed to 44.9 percent.

“We need to make economic self-sufficiency a top priority for the business community,” said Tim Sappington, executive director of the North Central Workforce Investment Board. “Creating good jobs and educating workers to fill them go hand in hand. By improving the skills of workers, we simultaneously increase the competitiveness of our companies. That’s why, there’s significant commitment to this process from both workers and employers.”

The Workforce Solutions Group is a coalition led by the Women’s Union, the Massachusetts Workforce Board Association, the Organizing and Leadership Training Center and the Massachusetts AFL-CIO and funded by [Skillworks](#).

Their intent is to bring together a broad range of employers, unions, education and training providers, community colleges, immigrant advocates, work-force investment boards and interfaith organizations. These diverse groups are united by their common interest in having a strong and effective workforce development system.