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Program aims to aid drop-outs

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LEARN MOREWhat: Urban Youth Employment Program Serves: 18- to 21-year-olds from Greater Springfield who have dropped out of school or have misdemeanor criminal records Provides: Workforce training; assistance in enrolling in GED and post-secondary education programs Sponsor: Urban League of Springfield For info: Call (413) 739-7211, Ext. 110 SPRINGFIELD - Thanks to a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, the Urban League of Springfield began recruiting applicants yesterday for its Urban Youth Employment Program for 18- to 21-year olds who have dropped out of school or faced misdemeanor criminal convictions.

Urban League Senior Vice President Andrew R. Cade said the program will help enroll high school drop-outs in general equivalency diploma programs, assist with post-secondary education, and provide workforce training.

The program has 45 slots for qualifying Greater Springfield residents. Walk-ins can apply at the Urban League, 765 State St., where an information session will be held Oct. 18 at 5 p.m.

"It's hard for anyone who has a (criminal) record to get back on track and that's what part of this program is about," Cade said. "We're empowering these youth to not only get jobs but also to make themselves self-sufficient for the rest of their lives."

Cade said the Greater Springfield area has seen an increasing number of youth who are considered "high risk" because they have either dropped out of school, faced misdemeanor convictions in the court system, or both.

The grant of \$236,250 was awarded by the Department of Labor to the National Urban League, which funneled the money locally.

Urban League Chief Executive Officer Henry M. Thomas III said, "The underlying expectation is that early exposure to career opportunities will spark a desire for knowledge and introduce the concept of lifelong learning as an essential component toward continuous development ... for youth disenfranchised from mainstream America."

Program partners include the Hampden County Sheriff's Department, the office of Hampden District

Attorney William M. Bennett, Future Works, Branford Career Institute, Faith Unlimited, AWAKE, area colleges and other community organizations.

Youth will be required to attend weekday sessions from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. for 32 weeks. They will receive a small stipend for community service work and be eligible for internships and jobs upon completion.

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