

Area businesses learn how Angels Share program could benefit companies, youth

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Area businesses learned how Angels Share, a nonprofit aimed at helping youth aging out of foster care, could benefit both them and the youth during a videoconference call Wednesday afternoon.

Angels Share founder and president Ed Shada, Bobbi Jo Howard and Shane Donovan of Heartland Workforce Solutions and Mike Rooks, executive director of Gateway Development, presented the information.

Shada said as many as 12 youth could be on the former Dana College campus later this month or the beginning of July as renovations on the apartment-style dormitories are completed.

Angels Share has been working with more than 30 service providers to identify youth who are interested in learning a trade or receiving on the job training. The youth would come from Omaha and other areas across the state.

“We're really working to find youth that really want to work, youth that want to take that next step and youth that are interested in finding the right jobs and working,” he said.

“We're really looking for this first group that comes in to be a very solid group,” he added. “With that, we have to have support from the businesses. If we're going to have these kids come in, they're going to need to interview with you all, have an opportunity to select a job and then work that position.”

Howard and Donavan explained the opportunities youth could have with area businesses and the benefits those businesses could see through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The programs to place youth with businesses include National Able and DESI.

“Both programs assist clients with obtaining the career goals through training and supportive services,” Howard said. “Employment is the goal. We want to help them focus on their job and improve their job retention.”

Youth could earn work experience and skills through short-term employment.

“I kind of look at it like a paid internship,” Donovan said. “These individuals will be placed at a worksite for six to eight weeks. We pay the wages.”

Businesses could also offer on-the-job training, in which the youth are directly hired by the employer. The candidates would be prescreened by Heartland Workforce Solutions based on hiring needs.

WIOA funding would reimburse companies the wages for each participant hired. Participants must work full time — a minimum of 35 hours — and receive at least \$12 an hour.

Shada addressed any concerns businesses may have about the backgrounds of those who would participate in the Angels Share program.

“We're asking the kids to be honest, be up front,” he said. “We're keeping there service providers who have been working with them since the beginning. We're not just looking at throwing these kids up there and saying they are on their own.”

Shada said he hopes to continue to grow the Angels Share program. There is currently room for 24 youth. If the nonprofit receives \$500,000 in DED HOME funds and \$750,000 in National Affordable Housing Trust Funds, it can construct approximately 60 apartments in the former Blair and Mickelsen halls.

“We're going to keep this growing and keep this going,” he said. “With the first apartments coming online here, I think we've taken an important step.”

Rooks said the programs offered through Angels Share could be a benefit to area businesses that are seeking to hire.

“I like to think of this program as it's just another tool in the tool box for employment,” he said. “If a company is struggling in Washington County, let's help them out by giving them viable applicants. I think this is definitely going to help in that scenario.”