

BENTON HARBOR

Youth employment initiative expected to help more than 200

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BENTON HARBOR — Two hundred young people will gain work experience and spending money this summer through the Benton Harbor Youth Works! Initiative.

This will be the fifth year for the program, which will place the participants in jobs and pay their wages. The program is open to residents of the Benton Harbor school district ages 14 to 21.

Jobs will start June 18 and end July 27. They will work 30 hours per week and receive the minimum wage of \$7.15 per hour.

Job seekers can apply at the Michigan Works! office at 499 W. Main Street through June 6. The office is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Mondays through Fridays with extended hours on Wednesdays until 8, and from 8 a.m. to noon on Saturdays.

The program is open to past participants.

"We've made big improvements to the program" Todd Gustafson, executive director of the Berrien-Cass-Van Buren Michigan Works!, said in a news release. "Now, instead of random placements, young people are strategically matched with jobs based on their skills and interests. This helps to guide young people on their own personal career paths."

Candice Elders, tri-county Michigan Works! community

relations manager, said the jobs will be with a variety of public and private employers, including governments, non-profit organizations and businesses, such as restaurants.

She said the program is being funded by a grant from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

Before starting their jobs, participants will attend a workshop at Michigan Works! June 16 to receive training about positive work habits, career planning and money management.

"We want to ensure a good experience for our employer customers," Gustafson said, "so appropriate employee matches and adequate training are always essential."

Elders said employers who want to provide some Youth Works! jobs can still apply. They should call her at 927-1064, ext. 1144.

She said the Youth Works! program has provided employment for 200 young people each year.

"The tremendous response to this program shows the desire and ambition of local youth who are already thinking about their futures," said Berrien County Commissioner Mamie Yarbrough, who has been on the Youth Works! Planning Committee since the program's inception in 2003. "We owe our success to the local businesses who continue to mentor young people during their employment experiences."