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\$250,000 grant a boost for green jobs training

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A Des Moines group that works with former offenders and other hard-to-employ people plans to add green-jobs training with the help of a \$250,000 grant.

Jerald Brantley, chief executive of Spectrum Resources, says the center will add solar energy and fiber optics training, with funding from the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, based in Washington, D.C.

The foundation received \$10 million from the federal government to help groups provide services to disadvantaged youth and adults. Foundation President Alan Curtis said the money will go to 20 programs across the nation that provide services that range from mentoring to after-school safe havens.

The foundation will look to replicate successful programs in other communities.

"Here in Washington, everything is about the middle class and the next election, but this money will provide some attention to the truly disadvantaged," Curtis said Friday.

Brantley said his group has raised about \$800,000 to provide training for up to 50 students during the program's first year. The training will enable students to build and install solar panels as well as work on copper and fiber optics networks.

Brantley said the training is in fields - energy and communication systems - where there is growth. President Barack Obama plans to spend millions of dollars helping states and communities improve their energy and broadband networks.

Spectrum was formed in 1995 and works with adults who struggle to find and keep jobs. Many were recently released from prison, have dropped out of high school or have substance abuse problems.

Brantley said Spectrum connects clients to an array of services to help them overcome personal problems while training and searching for a job.

"It's hard for a parent to concentrate on a job if he's worried about where his kids will sleep or what they'll eat," Brantley said. "We want people to deal with their baggage so they can keep their job."

Getting ex-offenders connected to jobs is good for the community, said Kerry Koonce of Iowa Workforce Development. A national study shows offenders who land jobs within six months of their release from prison are 2½ times less likely to return to jail, she said.

Brantley said the recession prompted Spectrum to shift its focus from construction training to more general job placement services. "Our focus has just been employment, employment, employment," Brantley said.

The group helped 775 clients last year, most of whom were people just released from jail. He said 87 percent of clients found jobs and 82 percent held their jobs for more than six months.

The average pay was around \$10.82 an hour.

Brantley said an uptick in the housing industry could mean the group's construction trades training -

such as carpentry and electrical - could begin again next spring.

Additional Facts

Open house on Monday

Spectrum Resources plans to kick off its new training initiative with an open house from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday at Lifeline Resources, 100 E. Euclid Ave., Suite 413, in Des Moines.
