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Partners pull together to help people facing layoffs

Private and public organizations collaborate to simplify the “unemployment maze” for businesses and employees with a new web portal, other tools

Lines at the unemployment office are growing longer as more businesses layoff employees. The 2-1-1 information line to social services is running at full capacity. As a difficult economy sends waves of out-of-work people looking for help, agencies in Snohomish County are finding better ways to meet the growing need.

A coalition of private and public partners has joined forces to make it easier for laid-off workers to find their way through a maze of information and resources, and also help ease the crush through the “front door” to services by making it easier for people to find help themselves.

The group is inviting people to come hear about new and existing resources on November 12 at 10 a.m. in the Weyerhaeuser Room at the Everett Transit Station.

“We knew this was coming and decided we needed to pull together to see how we could best ease the pain,” said Sue Ambler, president and CEO of Workforce Development Council Snohomish County. “The partnership is looking at all the ways we can help people during challenging times by pooling our resources and by not duplicating services.”

Rapid response teams that go into companies with information for employees are one tool. A new web page, www.helpforhardtimes.org that puts links to all of the resources in one place is another.

Need to file for unemployment benefits? You’ll find a link to the online application that can save you time. You’ll also find links to other local resources, such as credit counseling, rent assistance, basic food benefits, medical and dental assistance, job training and more.

For the time being, the web portal is hosted on United Way of Snohomish County's website. At some point, it will exist as a separate site, but partners thought it most important to respond quickly.

““When you're facing the loss of a job, you have enough to deal with. That's when we realized there was no one, single website that could help navigate someone through all the different agencies that offer resources,” said Carl Zapora, president and CEO of United Way of Snohomish County. He likened the web portal to “a gift basket for people who are out of work, with each of us donating an item to the basket.”

“The site, www.helpforhardtimes.org, doesn't reinvent existing resources—it simply pulls them all together so that they can easily be located. It's a great, simple tool for people out of work.”

In the future, partners envision using the web page as a portal for other issues as well, depending on the immediate need in the community. The list of collaborating partners would also likely change, based on who has the resources needed in a given situation.

The project is sponsored (includes a financial contribution) by The Boeing Company, EverTrust Foundation, United Way of Snohomish County, and Workforce Development Council Snohomish County.

Currently, partners include: Cascadia Community College, Center for Career Alternatives, Department of Social and Health Services, Edmonds Community College, Washington State Employment Security Department, Everett Community College, Salvation Army, Snohomish County Human Services Dept., United Way of Snohomish County, Volunteers of America Western Washington, North Sound 2-1-1, Workforce Development Council Snohomish County and WorkSource Snohomish County.

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