

Federal grant helps needy parents find work, job training

By FRANNY WHITE
Staff Writer

MOUNT VERNON — Needy parents can now find employment and job training through Skagit County Community Action Agency, thanks to a federal grant awarded July 1.

The \$430,000 grant makes Community Action the sole contractor to provide community jobs and supported work services to Skagit and San Juan counties through the state WorkFirst program, the state Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development announced in a news release this week.

WorkFirst serves parents who haven't been able to find work and receive federal Temporary Aid to Needy Family funds. Often, these parents have several barriers to becoming employed, such as physical and mental health issues, domestic violence, substance abuse and homelessness.

Community Action Deputy Director Karen Parnell said

that by providing WorkFirst clients with part-time work along with job training and case management to develop plans for overcoming employment barriers, the program aims to help clients gain full-time employment and to eliminate the need for public assistance.

When clients are recognized for their contributions at work, they can develop a more positive sense of self and begin to overcome other obstacles in their lives, said Lynn Christofersen, Community Action's director of education and volunteer services.

As the new local WorkFirst contractor, Community Action is providing services previously offered by another local agency called Work Now, Parnell said.

Community Action is one of 17 agencies awarded a total of \$19 million in federal funds for the WorkFirst program, the news release said.

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