



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**WORKFORCE PREPARATION NETWORK AWARDED \$178,078**

The Workforce Preparation Network (WPN), a United Way of Monroe County initiative, has been awarded a \$178,078 grant from the Lilly Endowment through the Indiana Association of United Ways' 4Community program. The WPN will use these funds to equip youth and displaced workers in our community with vital workforce skills.

Through WPN, forty community partners in business, industry, social service, education, government, and labor are working together to help Monroe County residents increase their opportunities for economic self-sufficiency.

Ed Vande Sande, director of WPN, explained the decision to address poverty through workforce preparation: "The 2003 SCAN assessment revealed that poverty is one of the most pressing issues in Monroe County. Further research attributed this, in part, to a lack of youth work skills, high drop-out rates, and under-employment. Increased self-sufficiency is the most sustainable avenue out of poverty. WPN partners are actively addressing these issues and, in the process, strengthening our community's ability to attract and fill living-wage jobs."

Barry Lessow, Executive Director of United Way of Monroe County commented that, "One of our priorities at United Way is to help reduce long-term demand on the social services safety net. We can do that by bringing community resources together in new ways that provide local residents with the skills and supports to productively enter and stay in the workforce. We are grateful to the Lilly Endowment for helping students and adults achieve their educational, vocational, and life goals."

WPN partners have spent the past year developing eight core projects to help youth and displaced workers. Some programs provide support for at-risk students, equip incumbent workers with necessary job skills, and provide career development and placement tools for transitional workers. Projects are led by several organizations, including the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce's Franklin Initiative, City of Bloomington, Ivy Tech Community College, MCCSC, Bloomington Life Sciences Partnership, Middle Way House, Girls Inc., and Rhino's Youth Center.

To find out more about WPN initiatives, visit [www.monroeunitedway.org/wpn.htm](http://www.monroeunitedway.org/wpn.htm). WPN Director Vande Sande can be reached at 812-334-8370 or [evsande@monroeunitedway.org](mailto:evsande@monroeunitedway.org).

United Way is a nonprofit organization that improves people's lives by mobilizing the caring power of our community. Through the Community Care Fund, United Way allocates resources to 25 member agencies that address the most pressing human service needs in Monroe County. United Way can be reached at 812-334-8370 or [www.monroeunitedway.org](http://www.monroeunitedway.org).

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