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GoodGuides tackling problem of youth obesity

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JOHNSTOWN — Since January 2010, Goodwill Industries of the Conemaugh Valley Inc. has watched its GoodGuides program grow.

Now, thanks to a recently received grant, the program will tackle the issue of obesity in children and youths.

GoodGuides, a mentoring program designed to help those ages 12 to 17 who have encountered barriers to success, received the grant from Youth Service America in conjunction with UnitedHealthcare to teach youth to become first responders through UnitedHealth Heroes' childhood and youth obesity project.

“We are pleased to be able to provide this opportunity to our GoodGuides youth, which is designed to assist in building critical thinking and decision-making skills, and it's even better that they will address a real problem as important as childhood obesity,” said Phyllis J. Bandstra, Conemaugh Valley Goodwill president and CEO.

Aligned with the Let's Move! Campaign launched by first lady Michelle Obama, first responders will provide guidance to peers and the community through the Five Stages of Service-Learning model. The stages are investigation, preparation and planning, action, reflection and demonstration/celebration.

Under the guidance of mentors, youths will present lessons on proper nutrition, weight management and food service careers. They'll prepare healthy food and distribute recipes at events.

Youths will be required to keep a log of their experiences, and the program will wrap up with a presentation during Global Youth Service Day events in April.

Debbie Roman, Goodwill Industries spokeswoman, said the program is a good fit to incorporate into GoodGuides.

“What youth learn they will be able to carry on to their families, peers and friends,” Roman said. “This is a learning project as well as a service project that will benefit the community.”

More than 70 GoodGuides youths have been matched with a mentor, but another 20 are waiting for mentors to volunteer.

“We have more youth who have come forward and shown interest; right now we are lacking mentors,”

Roman said.

“Mentors, ideally, offer career guidance and help youth become contributing members of the community.”

Mentors are asked to volunteer four hours a month or one hour a week for at least a year.

For information on becoming a mentor, call 536-3536, ext. 304, or e-mail goodguides

@goodwilljohnstown.org.