

**Goodwill Industries of Central Michigan's Heartland, Inc. thanks local Partners
for supporting Youth Employment.**

January 20, 2022 – Goodwill Industries of Central Michigan's Heartland, Inc. (GICMH) wishes to thank its local partners in the Battle Creek area who do a great job in supporting Youth Workforce Development.

A program that has over the past decade received a great deal of support is Goodwill Connects. Goodwill Connects is a six-week paid summer work experience program for Battle Creek youth who are at least 16 years old. During the program Connects students learn how to job search, interview and write a resume, cover letter, and resignation letter, as well as manage their income and work through conflicts. What makes the program unique is parent engagement, close partnership with schools, the use of career mentors, and youth-friendly employers who are committed to student success. Cesar Alvarez-Mares, a GICMH Financial Development Coach, said “Students really appreciate the time we commit to their success. It’s great to see students learn to manage their money in such a short period.”

Sheryl Watson, VITA Community Coordinator of GICMH noted that “some students have gone on to permanent employment with the great companies that they worked for through the summer. Many students go on to college or skilled trades.” Goodwill Connects gives students real-world experience on what it’s like to have a job in an environment that provides the opportunity to make mistakes and learn with the continued support of a career mentor that is working with them and helping guide them through the process. Sheryl Watson further added “It’s a really good learning experience on how to succeed on the job. It’s exciting to note that many of the students stay in touch long after they’ve completed the program.”

Andy Iasci, Lead Career Mentor for Goodwill Connects said “Kids have dreams, and they know what they want to do when they get older; they just don’t necessarily know how to get there. Sometimes it just starts with the power of work - getting a job, understanding expectations, and getting on a routine. I feel that the kids that go through the program kind of get a leg up. We celebrate their successes with them, and we pick them up when they make mistakes. At the end of the program, not only do they have valuable work experience, but they’ve also got Goodwill whenever they need them to help with whatever services Goodwill is offering. It’s good for the kids, it’s good for the employers and it’s good for the community.”

GICMH is known for its advocacy of people with disabilities, in 2022 program staff noted a sharp increase in the number of youths with disabilities seeking employment. Amber Damron, a Youth Workforce Development Specialist of GICMH said that she enjoys the opportunities that the program provides to youth with disabilities, enabling them to get hands-on experience in a supportive environment.

To participate in Goodwill Connects 2023 visit www.GoodwillCMH.org or call (269) 788-6500 extension 2018, and speak to the Youth Workforce Development Team.

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