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GATEWAY OFFERS YOUTH, ADULTS CHANCE FOR COLLEGE EDUCATION

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"Gateway has given me the self-assurance and the challenge I needed for self-growth." - Hannah Howell

"I'm glad something like this has come along. It has given people like me another chance . . ." - Tony Bolin

"I now have the opportunity to make up for the skills I missed. I appreciate having the chance to go to school to better my life and give my family the better quality of life they deserve." - Karen Sanderfur

"Through the academic and career counseling I have received at Gateway, I now know what I want to do in life." - Cherie Sweet

These are some student assessments of the year-old Gateway Center program being offered in Evansville's center city by the University of Southern Indiana, taking the University programs to students who for a variety of reasons would not otherwise have considered college classes.

The Gateway goal is to provide an easily accessible and comfortable environment in which minority and economically disadvantaged adults can take their first steps toward higher education and more productive employment.

Gateway is located in the former St. John School building at 625 Bellemeade, in walking distance for many students. It also is on the city bus line and Gateway staff will aid students in finding transportation, if needed, and with finding convenient child-care programs -- two major items that could keep them from venturing into a college setting.

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Another problem, of course, is financial. Students are assisted in finding adequate financial support for their studies, with many qualifying for 100 percent tuition through Pell Grant or other assistance programs.

Kandace Hinton, Gateway director, said while the participation was limited the first year, enrollment for the second probably will double, for many reasons. "A student will bring a friend in and sit with them while we discuss what Gateway can offer them. Neighbors stop by to discuss the program and may enroll in a course. Churches in the area are relaying the message that Gateway Center can help," Ms. Hinton said.

One of the better recruiters has been a Gateway neighbor, the Evansville Black Coalition. The agency handles job-skill and job-search activities for its clients, and has referred about 10 people to Gateway, half of whom remain in the program.

Ms. Hinton said one of the first was Hannah Howell, a Gateway success story, the kind of person who is the reason for Gateway's existence. Ms. Howell is a single mother of four who has held part-time jobs in the past. She had obtained a general education degree (high school GED) and was in search of another part-time job when she visited the Black Coalition office a year ago and was referred to Gateway.

Ms. Howell and Gateway meshed -- she entered developmental courses last fall and by spring, was embarking on freshman-level college courses en route to earning a degree in nursing. And, said Ms. Hinton, she is doing it with a 4.0 grade point average.

Ms. Hinton said Gateway's first-year assessment -- 63 percent of the students have completed several courses; 76 percent have moved from developmental courses into regular college courses; 84 percent of the latter are in good academic standing -- doesn't tell the story the staff sees among the students. The increased motivation and self-worth are evident, she said, among people who were "on the road to nowhere" and now want to learn. They are not deterred by failing to get an "A" or "B" or even by failing a test -- they are motivated enough to repeat the class. "We see a general trend -- they want to learn," Ms. Hinton said.

Gateway will begin its fall semester on Monday, August 27. Registration and orientation will be held Thursday and Friday, August 23-24, at the center. Anyone interested in the program is invited to drop by and discuss their situation with the Gateway staff, or call 424-2926 for information.