



Don Campbell / HP staff

Corey Huston of Benton Harbor assembles automotive reflectors Thursday at Regal Finishing in Coloma. He got the job through the Benton Harbor Bridge Academy with Kinexus, which receives funding through the United Way of Southwest Michigan. Huston is one of almost 67,000 people helped by the United Way in 2013.

United Way helps people succeed

Bridge Academy at Kinexus helps BH man find his goal

Editor's note: The following is the first in a series of United Way Success Stories to coincide with United Way of Southwest Michigan's annual campaign.

By **LOUISE WREGE**
HP Staff Writer

Corey Huston of Benton Harbor said he felt lost after graduating from Benton Harbor High School in 2007.

The classes he took at Lake Michigan College in Benton Township weren't working out, and then his mother died.

"After that, I ended up moving to Flint for a couple of years," the 25-year-old said.

He said he and his girlfriend moved back to Benton Harbor after having a baby in November 2011 so relatives could help with child care.

But he still felt like his life had no direction.

"It seemed like I could never get a step up," he said. "It seemed like I couldn't catch a break."

Then he signed up in the fall of 2013 to take classes at the Benton Harbor Bridge Academy with Kinexus, which receives fund-

ing from the United Way of Southwest Michigan.

"(The Bridge Academy) helped me figure out a lot," Huston said. "All my life, I never really knew what I wanted to do."

Huston said the staff at the Bridge Academy helped him find a goal, and it helped him break down all of the barriers that kept him from reaching that goal — such as overcoming deficiencies in math and reading.

Through the Bridge Academy, he did a career exploration project and discovered LMC's magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) program.

"I like technology and electronics," he said.

He graduated in the spring with a Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Training certificate and scored gold on his National Career Readiness Certificate.

Today, his plan is to get a job as a phlebotomist until he finishes his training to be an MRI technologist. He said he takes his final phlebotomy exam Tuesday.

Meanwhile, he is working at Regal Finishing in Coloma, a job he said he found because of his Bridge Academy contacts.

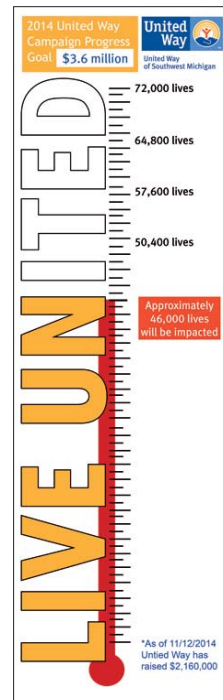
Huston is one of the almost 67,000 people helped by the United Way of Southwest Michigan in 2013, said Rachel Wade, director of impact strategies. She said those people were helped through 50 programs at 34 organizations.

Megan McCausland, director of communications with Kinexus, said the United Way funding is vital because it provides flexible funding to meet immediate needs.

"If there's a trainee not coming to school because they don't have a coat, it allows us to buy a coat," she said.

She said about 50 students have graduated each year from the Bridge Academy since it opened in 2010.

Wade said the United Way is in the middle of its annual fundraising campaign, which has a goal of raising at least \$3.6 million



by the end of the year.

She said community volunteers help make all funding decisions.

"It's not the United Way's money. It's the community's money that they have entrusted to us. We need to be good stewards," she said.

For information on the programs funded by the United Way or to donate money, call 982-1700. Information can also be found on its website at www.uwsm.org.

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