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Greater Stark County Stops Admiring the Problem... and Finds Solutions

The data speak volumes. There are unfilled jobs, unemployed and underemployed workers, empty seats in college and training classes, and families with insufficient income. As always, there is no silver bullet single solution – success depends on a convergence of strategies implemented by constituencies across the county.

One area of focus has been to connect or reconnect adults who will benefit by completing an education beyond high school – an associate degree, bachelor's degree, technical certificate or apprenticeship. The efforts in this arena are paying dividends for the students and for the education institutions. Over the past 18 months, local strategies have included:

- Stark Education Partnership's [EAFSA21 grant](#) to support student applications for financial aid;
- Stark Education Partnership's multi-year grant from KnowledgeWorks supporting the efforts of local public universities to attract [adults who have stopped out of college](#) into returning to complete their career certificates and/or degrees;
- Strengthening Stark's [Jobs Platform](#), providing real time job opportunities;
- Strengthening Stark's [Career Connect](#) which brings support organizations and agencies together with businesses to actually walk potential candidates to and through the onboarding process;
- Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce's coordination of industry sector partnerships to expand relationships between talent developers and workforce;
- And, the creative efforts of local universities to provide free and low cost tuition for new and returning students.



The bottom line is the return on investment.

Kent State University (KSU) reports that their efforts to market and support adults returning to college to complete their credential/degree have paid huge dividends. The 1,438 adults returning to college generated approximately \$9 million of revenue in tuition and state share of instruction subsidy for the University. In Stark County, those KnowledgeWorks grant funds provided to KSU (included in the data) brought 13 students back to the local campus and generated \$85,000 in revenue for Kent State University at Stark.

Lucas Brewer, Stark State Director of Financial Aid and Scholarships and Enrollment Management, shared that they have also seen a significant return on their financial investment. And, several students who received the grant funds to eliminate barriers not only returned to their education pathway, but are also getting ready to graduate. *"These students are forever changed, and the ROI for themselves and their families (and the NE Ohio workforce) is beyond measure."*

The Stark Education Partnership (a 501(c)3 non-profit organization) collaborates with education, business, civic and community members across the entire spectrum – cradle to career – to create and respond to opportunities that will provide ALL students with education and career success.

