Program seeks to help single mothers achieve independence

By EYE NEWMAN
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Even better, she’s “100 times more mature” than she was a few months ago.

“Bettering our lives”

Amanda Schneider, left, receives a hug during a CLIMB Wyoming graduation ceremony Thursday evening at the Depot. Schneider was one of seven women to graduate this spring.

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In Laramie, that’s mainly office careers, said program director Katie Hogarty. Participants meet several times a week for training in hard and soft job skills. They learn how to operate various computer programs such as QuickBooks and Excel while also learning etiquette and ethics. They also receive training in areas such as parenting, nutrition, relationships and even self-defense. Plus, they receive individual and group counseling to prepare for long-term success.

Hogarty said the CLIMB office works with employers to fit graduates into positions that match their skills, interests and personalities. The office reimburses employers for the first eight weeks of wages, payroll taxes and workers’ compensation when they hire a graduate, in exchange for supportive on-the-job training. “We are matchmakers,” she said.

So far, one of the spring’s graduates has secured a job. Several have conducted interviews with the city of Laramie, Albany County and Albany County Public Library, among others.

Long-term prospects are good. Seventy-five percent of local graduates are employed two years after they finish the program, compared to fewer than half beforehand.

On average, incomes increase from $11,300 a year before the program to $21,500 two years later. Food stamp participation drops from 62 percent to 39 percent.

Hogarty praised this spring’s group for their commitment to each other. They shared bikes, beds, meals and rides. They took care of each other’s children, provided emotional support and laughed together.

“Sometimes when you’re alone and a single mom, life feels really isolated,” Hogarty said. “This group has really taken advantage of that peer support.”

As she called each graduate’s name, Hogarty pointed out strengths the woman exhibited during the program, such as calmness, perseverance, grace and leadership. “This group has been such a gift to be a part of,” she said.

Schneider said the evening was bittersweet. “I’m feeling every emotion there could possibly be. I’m holding back tears,” she said. When asked about the motivation for joining and finishing CLIMB, she didn’t hesitate with her answer — he was wearing a green stocking cap and climbed into her lap partway through the program.

“I’m ready to start bettering our lives,” she said.