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NYS awards Foodlink nearly \$1M in Workforce Development Initiative funding

Grant will help sustain, expand Foodlink's culinary training apprenticeship

ROCHESTER – Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul visited Foodlink Monday to announce multiple grant award winners from Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Workforce Development Initiative.

Foodlink is receiving a nearly \$1 million award to support the Foodlink Career Fellowship, a one-of-a-kind culinary training program that creates pathways to prosperity for individuals with barriers to sustainable employment. The program was recognized by the Department of Labor in 2019 as the state's first and only registered cook apprenticeship. Funding allows Foodlink to sustain and expand the program, starting with the recruitment and launch its third class of participants this summer, and a fourth class in early 2021.

"Putting people first is central to our mission," said Julia Tedesco, President & CEO of Foodlink. "The Foodlink Career Fellowship epitomizes our belief that our role as an organization extends well beyond food banking. We nourish thousands of people on a daily basis, but also create opportunities for individuals to be empowered with the skills they need for a healthier future. We're forever grateful that the state has recognized the potential of this innovative program to spur economic development, and transform lives in our communities."

The Foodlink Career Fellowship launched in 2018 to train individuals for middle-skills careers in the regional food industry. Fellows are nominated into the program, and progress through a yearlong curriculum that includes both classroom and hands-on training within Foodlink's state-of-the-art commercial kitchen, where they help prepare after-school and summer meals for Rochester students. Eight members of the inaugural graduating class secured full-time employment in 2019, while seven current members of the Fellowship are more than halfway through the program.

The state's Workforce Development Initiative (WDI) is investing \$175 million in job training projects. Awarded projects support strategic regional efforts that meet businesses' short-term workforce needs, long-term industry needs, improve regional talent pipelines, enhance the

flexibility and adaptability of local workforce entities, and expand workplace learning opportunities.

Aside from Foodlink, the following organizations were recognized by Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul during Monday's announcement: Baxter, Genesee Construction Service, Graham Corporation, Lifetime Assistance, Mary Cariola Children's Center, McAlpin Industries, Optimax, Ortho Clinical Diagnostics, Prestolite, and Wayne Finger Lakes BOCES.

Foodlink was awarded funding through the WDI's Pay for Success program, which focuses on training opportunities for underserved and underemployed populations. Rochester Mayor Lovely A. Warren and Monroe County Executive Adam Bello also attended the announcement and delivered remarks in praise of the program.

"The number one issue I hear from employers across the state is that they can't find workers with the skills they need for 21st century jobs," said Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul. "That is why we are investing \$3.1 million in job training programs spearheaded by nearly 70 upstate New York businesses, non-profits, and community organizations that will benefit 3,600 New Yorkers as part of our historic \$175 million Workforce Development Initiative. The nearly \$1 million in funding for Foodlink will expand the organization's culinary training program and create more opportunities for individuals in the food industry. The investment is part of our overall efforts to close the skills gap and prepare New Yorkers for jobs today and in the future."

Foodlink launched the program with guidance from Wegmans Food Markets, and through private funding support from the William G. McGowan Charitable Fund, ESL Charitable Foundation and the William and Sheila Konar Foundation, which also funded the launch of the second class in 2019. The program includes nine months of training at Foodlink, and three months of an externship at a regional employer.

"Before arriving at Foodlink, I wasn't reaching my true potential," said Da'Quan Quick, who was a member of the Foodlink Career Fellowship's inaugural graduating class. "The Fellowship made me believe in myself, and gave me skills I needed to launch a career."

As a registered apprenticeship, several local employers have partnered with Foodlink as potential landing spots for program graduates. Many of the 2019 graduates moved into full-time roles at Wegmans Food Markets stores and restaurants in the Rochester area. The Kelaron Group, which includes restaurants such as Salena's Mexican Restaurant and Nox, the Rochester Institute of Technology and the Del Monte Hotel Group, are collaborating with Foodlink, as well.

Foodlink has guided one class through the program in each of the first two years since its launch, however it has committed to hosting two classes of approximately 15 participants each in the year ahead thanks to the state's investment. Foodlink's staff will begin to recruit soon for the launch of the third class in July. A fourth class would begin six months later in January of 2021.

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About Foodlink

For more than 40 years, Foodlink has leveraged the power of food to end hunger and build healthier communities in Allegany, Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates counties. Through good stewardship, innovation and collaboration, Foodlink mobilizes a diverse network of community partners to address both the symptoms and root causes of food insecurity.

Foodlink's community health programs provide new access points to nutritious and affordable food in underserved communities. We empower individuals and families to make healthy choices through nutrition and culinary education initiatives. Through our food bank, we distribute nearly 20 million pounds of food annually to a network of nonprofit partners. The Foodlink Community Kitchen nourishes thousands of children daily with healthy meals, slices locally grown apples that are distributed throughout New York, and prepares people for careers in the regional food industry through a one-of-a-kind career empowerment program. Learn more about how we are transforming lives and creating healthy futures for every community we serve at www.FoodlinkNY.org, or follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram at @foodlinkny.

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