

THE PLAIN DEALER



By Marcia Pledger

Men rebuild their lives, careers.

Michael Johnson wanted to be optimistic as he flipped through a brochure for the Towards Employment agency in March. Yet all he felt was skepticism. A fruitless six-month job search makes a 21-year-old feel that way.

Towards Employment is one of 20 social-service agencies that benefit from this year's Plain Dealer Holiday Spirit drive. Since 1976, Towards Employment has served more than 100,000 people. It helps people land and keep jobs.

"I was skeptical because of what some people told me about the job-readiness program. It's not easy. You have to really work hard," Johnson said.

The agency's clients vary greatly. Some have never touched a computer. Others need help with soft skills like communication. Everybody gets interview training.

Johnson credits the agency for helping him get two jobs. A 30-day work experience turned into a full-time job at Planet Aid, a Solon nonprofit that collects and sells donated clothes to support impoverished areas around the world. **And Towards Employment sent him to the Cleveland Industrial Training Center, where the director later recommended him to an employer. Brooklyn Heights-based Profile Grinding hired Johnson in September, a month before he finished his machinist training.**



"It worked out for me better than I ever expected," Johnson said.

"I never had to look for a job. Jobs came to me. But I was totally prepared for all of it. Towards Employment helps break down the employment process with test questions and scenarios. I brought in my A game and used everything they taught me. I was pumped."