A National Emergency Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor is providing retraining and reemployment services to coal miners and eligible family members impacted by layoffs and coal mine closures. The financial assistance is aimed at providing new skills for long-term reemployment opportunities.

The funds, which are also available to spouses and other family members living in the home, provide up to $5,000 per participant for occupational skills training in high-demand fields such as health-related occupations, commercial truck driving, welding, electrical engineering, HVAC repair, diesel technology, and chemical processing. Participants who meet training program attendance requirements will also be eligible for training allowances to cover costs of gas, food, child care, etc. at the rate of $20.00 per day for the days attending class up to $100.00 per week.

Larry Caudill of Danville is one of hundreds of individuals who have already received training through the grant. He was laid off from his coal mining job because of a downturn in the market. When he visited a WorkForce WV office to file for unemployment, he learned about the grant to re-train miners who had lost their jobs. He signed up for a five-week commercial driving program at Boone Truck Driving Academy that would train him for a job in the trucking industry. He received money each week from the grant, in addition to collecting his unemployment benefits. He now works for Lowe’s as a CDL/delivery driver.

“The money is nice, I have good benefits, and I’m home every night,” he said. “I have peace of mind that my family is taken care of. I can pay the bills and spoil my kids and buy Christmas presents.”

Larry is thankful the grant money was available when he needed it.

“I couldn’t have paid for the training myself,” he said. “If the grant money hadn’t been there to open the door to different career, I don’t know what I would have done. I would probably be working two or three jobs trying to make ends meet.”

Jennifer Bigley of Big Creek has also received assistance from the program. Jennifer’s husband was laid off from a Boone County coal mine, and they had to find another source of income.

“We were in a hard position with two kids,” she said. “I’d started college right out of high school but never finished because I decided to stay at home with them.”

After learning about the grant from the United Mine Workers of America’s career center, Jennifer decided to go back to school to pursue a career as a health care technician. Her tuition was 100% paid by the grant, and she received additional money for her transportation costs. Jennifer is excited about returning to the workforce and sees this program as a blessing to her family.

She said, “It’s wonderful. It opened a new door, which I know will help benefit our family greatly.”