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Young adults being put to work

Norwich program provides teens with employment help

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NORWICH -- Area students are getting a taste of the real world this summer with jobs at the Salvation Army, Otis Library, Mohegan Park and even the Uncas Health District.

The Summer Youth Employment Program through the city's Department of Youth and Family Services is giving students the benefit of a first job as well as the luxury of a paycheck. The program also gives them the skills they need to succeed later in life, according to Pat Dixe, program coordinator at youth and family services.

"This program offers some valuable work services," Dixe said. "It's especially an awesome opportunity for the younger teens who don't get a lot of opportunity to work."

Interview tips

Monday, students in the program were visited by representatives from area companies including Stop & Shop and Wal-Mart for tips about the job interview and application process. The students, including Kyle White of Norwich, learned the importance of dressing for success.

"I knew dressing right was part of it, but this really broke it down for me," he said after a presentation by Wal-Mart managers on what they look for in an interview. "I learned a lot today."

State funded

The program, funded with state dollars through the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, serves 81 low-income students ages 14 through 21. The five- to six-week program pays \$7.65 per hour, the minimum wage rate, and is in its second year. It was recently extended into next year, Dixe said, offering this year's participants the opportunity to return.

"People in the legislature are really seeing the value of the program," Dixe said.

For Bobbie Braboy, 14, of Norwich the job is her first, but she's already learning the traits of a leader. Braboy is working with Connecticut Works Youth to make the program more friendly for young adults.

"It's a good program," she said. "I get specific directions and I can offer my own ideas and people listen."

Braboy said more jobs asking students to become involved at a younger age would help.

"It's hard to find jobs," she said.

Dixe said for Norwich, the program cultivated community.

"These nonprofits are pulling together to give kids the opportunities to learn about work, while also giving them a way to help with their family's basic needs like buying their own school clothing," she said.

Real work, real pay

And that paycheck is an important part of the program, said Peter Schultheis, director of youth and family services.

"It's a good reminder that their effort is rewarded," he said, adding each student is encouraged to open a savings account with some of their pay.

Katherine Rose, 14, of Norwich plans to return next summer.

"I'm glad to have this job," she said of her work at the Salvation Army. "It gives me money and something to do."
