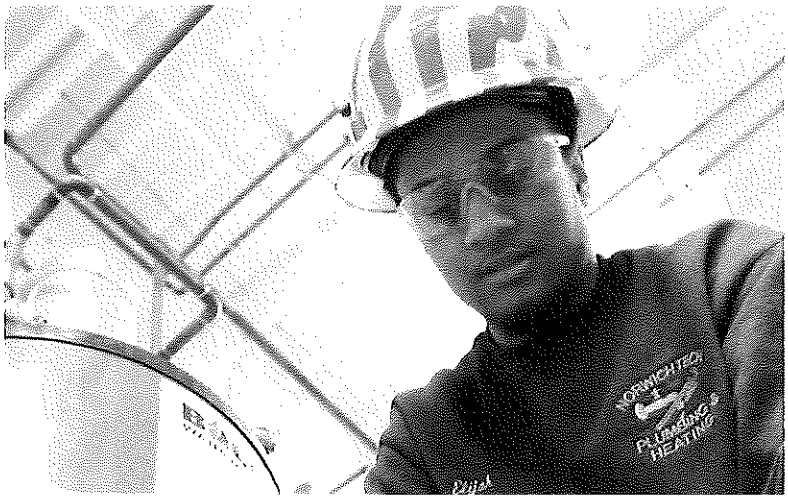
The Bulletin
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As the Connecticut jobs picture brightens, some see hope for young workers. Here's why.



Norwich Technical High School students get hands-on experience in plumbing, carpentry, electrical work and more.

Matt Grahn

Norwich Technical High School Principal Don Concasia believes the jobs picture is great right now for young workers.

"For kids with some theory and some trade under their belt, the future's bright," Concasia said.

The unemployment picture is still recovering. The state of Connecticut's most recent data, from February, says that around 80% of jobs lost during the pandemic have been recovered. Some see the current climate as a time that can benefit young job seekers.

Mark Hill, president of the Eastern Workforce Investment Board, said the employment picture has been generally getting better, with, regionally, Electric Boat adding thousands of jobs to the region.

Hill also said that service sector jobs have been coming back with the ending of COVID-19 regulations.

"You have both those phenomena kicking in, and they're both beneficial to the region," Hill said.

People willingly not looking for a job due to COVID-19 is "still apparent," Hill added, but not what it was last year, as there were over 52,000 more people employed this February than last.

Even still, Hill said there's still opportunity for teens and fresh high school graduates to get jobs.

The Eastern Workforce Investment Board also runs a joint program with Eastconn, the Summer Youth Employment Program, which provides jobs for eligible residents of Eastern Connecticut aged 14 to 24 for 80 to 100 hours in the summer at minimum wage.

For this year, Hill said applications have been high. There are usually up to 450 positions hired program-wide, but there are already 800 applications since March. That benchmark is usually hit closer in the summer.

"A lot of youth in the region are really looking for opportunity," Hill said.

Hector Sanchez, the Youth Workforce Development Program Coordinator and In-School Youth Case Manager for Norwich Youth and Family Services, administers the Summer Youth Employment Program in Norwich. He's also noticed an increase in applicants for the job. Reflecting on last year, Sanchez said the program in Norwich aimed to serve 90 young workers but instead served 139.

The jobs range from various kinds of city work, to helping local small businesses.

"There are plenty of worksites in Norwich that want people from Norwich," Sanchez said. "The whole goal is to introduce them to the workforce, work in Norwich, and stay and better our economy."

Hill also said that young people pursuing full-time employment through the Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative, taking classes at their high schools, has gone well this year, with 80 students in the program.

These students will, once they graduate, be given more training, or get hired on the spot. Hill also said there's demand for a similar medical career program from area schools as well.

Similarly, Concasia said students that are in a technical high school program are able to get their theory work and have been able to build their experience, or can work directly for a company multiple days a week, and can have jobs out of school.

"Businesses that typically don't want to take in an apprentice will take in a tech school kid, because our kids have been out on the job," Concasia said.

However, Concasia mentioned a couple of factors proving challenging for youth entering the workforce. One is that retirees are still picking up work on a part-time basis, and possibly competing against young workers, though this has lessened with how many jobs are available now.

The other challenge for youth employment is access to driving, between the costs of learning how to drive, and maintaining the car itself.

"Kids whose parents are working two or three jobs, or kids who have a single parent and can't swing (the cost); it's difficult to get the license," Concasia said.

Sanchez also said transportation can be a challenge for young workers, though he added that the state's recent move to suspend bus fares until July helps. He also said another challenge is building up a resume and soft skills in the office.

"It's all about self-advocating and talking about yourself," Sanchez said.