

ESBLN Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network
Putting Ability to Work www.esbln.org
Submitted by Jackie Gast, Director

Well, it's back to school for many but for many students, school never really ended. There were hundreds of students in the tri-county area involved in summer employment that also included an academic piece. This article is about one example of these great programs happening in our communities.

Over the past twelve months, fourteen students successfully finished a program designed to prepare them for the workforce. These high school students from throughout Wicomico County were recruited from Career and Technology Education located at Parkside High School. The students accepted into the program participated in workforce training beginning in September of 2008. Each month they met for two hours learning about customer service, ethics in the workplace, expectations of employers, expectation of employees, and other work related subjects. By the end of the school year, the students and instructors had developed a student handbook designed to help them to be successful employees. As you guessed it, the next step was to gain summer employment.

Partnering with the Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce, all fourteen students found employment with twelve different employers in industries such as construction, landscaping, office work, custodial, horticulture, and hospitality. The term of employment was for six weeks and wages were paid by a grant from the Lower Shore Workforce Alliance - a nice benefit to employers particularly in this economy. It is important to note that none of the students replaced displaced workers. A handbook was also developed for participating employers to ensure that the student was getting a good job experience and to be clear about expectations.

One of the male students in the program was very quiet, did not care much for classroom learning and had long hair that was a little concerning to the instructor when it came to interviewing time. The day before this student was to interview for a construction job, he showed up with his hair neatly cut. When the surprised instructor asked why, he said he wanted to look good to his employer. After working for a while the employer commented that the student has a wonderful personality, is a hands-on learner, appreciates everything anyone does for him and is a hard worker.

The interesting piece to this Wicomico County program is that it concentrated only on students with disabilities. Disabilities ranged from various types of mental illness including Attention Deficit Disorder, to learning disabilities, to a student who is deaf. Interestingly, no accommodations were necessary for employment. The student who is deaf worked with folks that knew sign language. Accommodations were necessary for him at the trainings during the school year but not with the employer. Every student successfully completed this program and work experience. Several employers asked to have the six week term extended and some are hoping to hire on a permanent basis.

Fortunately, this program will begin again this year. If your company would like to participate next summer, contact the Chamber at 410 749-0144.