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# Editorial: Summer jobs program has long-lasting benefits

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While nationally employers have seen a trend away from teens finding or filling summer jobs, the Franklin County and North Quabbin region is getting help to buck that trend locally.

About 120 teens were employed last year at area businesses and industries through the federally funded Summer Jobs and Beyond program, and the program is returning this summer.

Funded with a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, Jobs and Beyond helps match youth in Montague, Orange and Ware with area employers needing workers.

Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board Director Patricia Crosby, whose agencies manages the program, says the youth are given a chance to learn new skills and get exposure to a working environment while getting paid. The employers get a chance to train someone in their field and build their future workforce. The grant covers salaries and worker's compensation insurance.

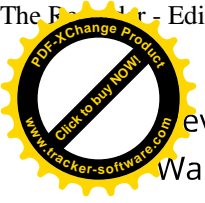
The youth employed range in age from 16 to 18 and the jobs span eight weeks, starting in July.

Crosby said the best jobs are ones where students can learn more about the industry, rather than just doing busy work. The agency has been recruiting employers this spring and summer.

The employment board looks for good matches of interests and skills between the youth and the business. The hope is that the summer placement could later turn into a full-time job at either the employer's business or a similar one in the area.

"A summer job can be a summer job, or it can be a building block for the future," Crosby told The Recorder.

In recent years, many area employers have complained that, too often, prospective workers come ill-prepared for the workplace environment. Crosby's program offers an opportunity to remedy that.



Even grants were awarded nationwide. The grant focuses on Montague, Orange and Ware, because the youth unemployment rate is 7 percentage points higher in those towns than the national average. The unemployment rate is nearly 34 percent for people ages 16 to 19 and 23 percent for ages 20 to 24, according to the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board.

Part of the program involved putting counselors in the schools in those towns who would help identify students appropriate for the program.

Among the employers signed up are Ja'Duke Center for the Performing Arts, Shanahan Construction, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Upingil Farm and the Gill-Montague Regional School District.

In July 1986, 57 percent of Americans aged 16 to 19 were employed. The proportion stayed over 50 percent until 2002, when it began dropping steadily. By last July, only 36 percent were working.

Economists and labor market observers worry that a lack of job opportunities will deprive teens of valuable work experience and of opportunities to encounter people of different ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds.

We are glad to see that in this area, at least, the unemployment board has been able to find the resources to bring the summer work experience and skills training to our young people. It's a program that can benefit them, employers and the community not just this summer but in the decades to come.

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