

New Youth Talent Adviser helps point teens to post-graduation opportunities

SOUTH COAST — South Coast Business Employment Corporation is helping area student get a feel for their post-graduation options by finding internships and opportunities for continued education.

According to Jessica Dawson, the Youth Talent Adviser for Coos County and Reedsport, the purpose of the program is to provide opportunities for students to gain work experience and learn what options are available for employment in different fields. This can take the form of internships, job shadowing, or similar options.

The goal is to give the students experiences to say whether a career is something they want to pursue. It also gives them something to put on their resume.

"I've been working with (students) to get their questions answered before they're just thrown in there," said Dawson during the February meeting of the Reedsport School Board.

She added the program's main goal is to give the students experience in the field they're interested in. She said she tries to give them something meaningful they can use in life going forward, whether it's a career opportunity or new skills.

"A lot of students don't know what they want to do," Dawson said. "So we have some exploration tools to help them figure that out."

The program also teaches students the skills necessary to find a job. Students learn how to write and update a resume, as well as how to fill out a job application. They also do practice interviews and get advice on when to follow-up with an employer.

"All the do's and don'ts of looking for work, so they don't have to wonder when it comes time," Dawson said.

The program works independently of the regular curriculum and is not a special class. Dawson said she went around the classrooms when the program started and explained what she did. Interested students can reach out to her to start talking and working together. Teachers can also refer students who express interest or don't know how to contact Dawson themselves.

"It's kind of a mixture of me pulling kids," she said. "I've been trying to meet with at least every student once, so that's been pretty easy."

She also holds workshops with classes to discuss various topics about resume writing, interviewing, among other skill. She'll also just answer questions students have. As an

example, Dawson said some students knew what went into a resume but didn't really know what it was for or how an employer used it.

At present, Dawson works mostly with juniors and seniors, though she has also worked with sophomores.

So far, Dawson said most of the students she's worked with have expressed interest in trades. They don't know what's out there, though, or how to get the needed education. She works with them to find the information and acts as an intermediary in getting in touch with the necessary people.

She added that, while she will help with information on colleges, most of her focus is on trades and trade school due to the gap in services and opportunities.

"We're trying to provide something that wasn't quite there before," she said. "I've been working with all of them, whether they want to go to college, or go to a trade school, or go right into a regular job. Just so they're prepared and ready, and know how. If they don't have any questions, (we) make sure everyone knows how to find those answers."

Dawson is also working to set up tours of businesses to take trips to. This way students are able to see what a typical work day looks like in a given field. They would also be able to talk to employees and hear directly from them about a line of work.

"They can see what it's like on a day to day basis, what it takes to get into that field, and just kind of see a picture they wouldn't normally see just by searching for it on the internet," Dawson said.

The program for this area covers seven high schools around Coos County and Reedsport. On Mondays, Dawson goes to Bandon; Tuesdays, North Bend; Wednesdays, Reedsport and Destinations; Thursdays, Marshfield; and Fridays, Powers and Myrtle Point. The schools in Coquille are not covered by the program, though Dawson said they hope to start working with students at Winter Lakes soon.

The Youth Talent program also does lots of work using Recruit HIPPO (Helping Individuals Pursue Professional Opportunities), a website that allows students to find internships and other openings for getting work experience. As Dawson explained to the Reedsport School Board, students can find an internship or job opportunity and submit their information. She'll then contact the employer and discuss whether they're still looking to fill the spot and interested in the student's information.

Alongside Dawson in Coos County, Recruit HIPPO works with Youth Talent Advisers helping students in Curry and Douglas counties. While there is a separate Douglas County adviser, Dawson covers the Reedsport schools since they're so close to Coos County.