

From the community Grant for Summer Work Experience Program Fills Vital Need



WSWEF students visit Oxford Airport. (Posted by office258, Community Contributor)

By **Community Contributor office258**

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The beginning of the summer brought news that the City of **Bristol** was not expecting. The State Summer Youth Employment Program positions in Bristol would be eliminated due to Connecticut's absence of a state budget.

Despite the jarring news, 30 Bristol high school students were given the opportunity to work a meaningful job within their community while developing the skills and personal qualities necessary for success in the workforce. The Walsh Summer Work Experience Program (WSWEF) was funded with a grant from the Tim and Mary Walsh Charitable Fund at Main Street Community Foundation and coordinated by the United Way of West Central Connecticut. It was started nearly a decade ago to initially serve additional youth that were not served by the state-funded program due to limited funding and eligibility requirements.

"WSWEF filled a vital need in the Bristol community this summer," said Susan Sadecki, President & CEO of Main Street Community Foundation. "The grant award was expanded to fund 10 more slots even before we knew the state program would be cancelled."

On the first day of the program, Nancy Micloskey, program coordinator of WSWEF, pointed to the board in front of her displaying \$1,717. "This is the amount you can make this summer if you show up for work every day," she told the students. "This is your earning potential."

The program received 70 applications and 42 students were interviewed. All 30 youth hired completed the seven-week program on August 11.

The first week of the program was spent in a classroom with Professor Christina Welch who had developed an innovative classroom curriculum with a strong focus on career readiness skills and social and emotional learning. The following six weeks provided each student a real world work experience four days a week, while the fifth day was spent in the classroom and on thoughtfully planned career exploration field trips.

Worksites were all in Bristol and included Bristol Hospital, the Bristol Board of Education, Biker's Edge, Boys and Girls Club of Bristol Family Center, Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut, New England Carousel Museum and Imagine Nation, A Museum Early Learning Center among others.

"What really makes the WSWEP unique is the innovative classroom curriculum and the field trips to employer sites in varying industries," stated Nancy Micloskey. "We're really looking at the lifelong impact that this program can have on the students."

Students visited Oxford Airport to learn about careers in aviation and airport management operations. A "Walking Tour of North Main Street, Bristol" included presentations at the Bristol Fire Department, Bristol Police Department, United States Post Office and a lunch conversation with the Mayor and other city officials. A representative from Thomaston Savings Bank also provided a financial literacy workshop.

"WSWEP was an incredible success and we hope to be able to provide this opportunity to students again next year," concluded Donna Osuch, President & CPO of the United Way of West Central Connecticut.

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