



NEWS

# High school students get chance at summer work experience

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By TAYLOR MURCHISON-GALLAGHER

STAFF WRITER

United Way of West Central Connecticut is offering 30 Bristol high school students a chance to gain work experience and to hone their workforce skills through the Walsh Summer Work Experience Program.

Nancy Micloskey, the community impact assistant coordinator with the UWWCC, said the program runs from June 25 to Aug. 10. The first week of class involved job coach and program instructor, Lori Theriault, who owns her own job coaching company, "Work It", administering a personality test. From there, students worked with Micloskey and Theriault to discover what potential careers would best match with their personalities, and that information is used to match each student to a local business, or worksite, for a summer job.

"This week, and each of the subsequent weeks through Aug. 10, they are at worksites in the community that we match them up with," said Micloskey. "Each Friday, they're with us in the classroom so we can further enhance the career readiness skills. They'll also be having resumes developed during the summer as part of the program. We did mock interviewing the first week, and we have a few new worksites this summer."

Jessenia Serrano, 16, will be going into her junior year at Bristol Central High School in the fall. As a part of BCHS's Avid program, a college-readiness program, Serrano found out about the Walsh Summer program.

She said she didn't know what to expect, but she wasn't nervous, either, to begin the program. She said that during first week the students gathered around a conference table, getting to know each other, and, in turn, learning about themselves.

"I kind of feel like, for me, I kind of know who I am, so, I feel like what was told to me just reaffirmed who I am as a person, and it came through with the test we took... That made me feel comfortable," said Serrano.



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Serrano, who plays the piano, guitar, bass guitar, and violin, hopes to pursue a career in the music industry, where she hopes to perform and produce her own music.

“Honestly, I feel like I kind of always knew... When I was little, I had a toy guitar and I would bring it to preschool with me, and I had like a fake little band, and we would play fake music together, but I was never like, ‘I want to do this for the rest of my life’ or ‘I wanna be a rockstar,’” said Serrano.

For her 13th birthday, Serrano was given a guitar, and she said she hasn’t put it down since.

Rebecca Hollman, 16, is also a student at BCHS, and found out about the program via flyers posted in the school

“It was a little nerve wracking because I didn’t know what was going on or how things were going to play out, I barely knew what my job was outside of United Way, so it was just kind of a learning process,” said Hollman.

She will spend her summer working with the WOW-Mobile, a mobile library, and the Board of Education.

“I’m learning a lot of social experiences, because I tend to be very introverted, so this kind of brought a new experience, plus, summer is usually the time of year when no one really does anything, so it’s better to be out and doing things than staying home,” said Hollman.

Hollman also wants to pursue a career in music, and has been drumming for the past three years.

“I’ve been a drummer for almost three years now and I wanted to be one forever,” she said. “It’s just always been a dream to be part of a band or some sort of music production... and overall, I get to pay my bills with something I love.”

Currently, Hollman hopes to attend Full Sail University in Florida, and then try to get internships in New York with a record label until she is able to work on and produce her own music.

Jeremiah Rodriguez, 17, attends Bristol Preparatory Academy, and is also hoping to pursue a career in music. Rodriguez said he has been rapping for years, but didn’t take it seriously until about three years ago. Now, he’s booked time in a studio to record three songs.

"I'm taking it pretty serious right now, but at the same time I'm not letting it distract me because I do want to get my education," said Rodriguez.

Rodriguez heard about the Walsh Summer program through his school, which told him it was a program for students hoping to gain work experience. He decided he needed to try the program because he had been applying to jobs but had yet to have any luck.

"I just filled out the paper, turned it in, and then they [United Way] called me," he said.

This program is possible due to a donor advised fund, the Tim and Mary Walsh Fund, through the Main Street Community Foundation.

"The donor saw a need in the Bristol community for summer work experience for students," said Micloskey. "He himself had an affiliation with a summer program, decades ago, he was a supervisor in a program, so he was well aware of the need in our community. And, he's continued to fund the program for about seven or eight years. Last year was the first year that United Way was the sponsor of the program."

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