



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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Kenosha County's Summer Youth Employment Program continues to provide jobs, life lessons for at-risk youth

KENOSHA – Kenosha County's Summer Youth Employment program wrapped up another successful season on Wednesday, with the dedication of a new mural at the Kenosha County Job Center.

The program, established in 2009, aims to provide at-risk youth with job and life-skills training, all while decreasing gang involvement and juvenile crime in the community.

“We as a county could spend money on juvenile detention, or we could make an investment in diversion and training at-risk youth to have a successful future,” said County Executive Jim Kreuser said. “To me, that choice is easy.”

Kenosha County's program is modeled off of the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Comprehensive Gang Model. It admits youths age 14 to 21, who are referred to the program by case managers, social workers, counselors, probation officers or teachers.

Participants are assigned to a worksite and are paid \$7.25 per hour for eight weeks. They also receive training on specific job duties as well as soft skills, such as arriving at work on time, appropriate communications in the workplace and conflict resolution.

Those who are students in the Kenosha Unified School District are eligible for a half credit toward graduation for completing a 12-hour course with a curriculum that teaches how to search, apply and interview for jobs, budgeting and financial management, and goal planning.

“This program covers a lot of bases in positioning at-risk youth to be successful in the workforce and in their lives,” said Donna Rhodes, Kenosha County's gang intervention supervisor. “It's also a great collaboration between government, human services agencies, schools and employers.”

This year's worksites included various Kenosha County Parks, the exterior grounds of Brookside Care Center and the grounds of the county's Civic Center campus in downtown Kenosha.

Private-sector employers participating in the program included Popeyes Chicken, Master Chief ATD Hand Car Wash, A&T Transportation, Leeward Business Advisors and Subway.

Some participants in the program worked for Youth Employment in the Arts, which creates public art for the community. The wildlife-themed mural unveiled Wednesday afternoon adds to a growing gallery in the main corridor of the Job Center. A mosaic created this summer will be installed at Bristol Woods Park.

Kenosha County Parks Director Matthew Collins praised the work of the program, which was the recipient of the 2016 Silver Star Award from the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association.

Within the county parks this year alone, program participants' tasks included trail maintenance, painting playground equipment and picnic tables, weeding, and cleanup of downed trees after storms.

"These are all very important tasks that the parks staff doesn't have the time to do," Collins said. "With the help of the Summer Youth Employment Program, we're able to keep after these very important details that the public really notices and appreciates."

Since 2009, the Summer Youth Employment Program has employed 2,267 at-risk youth who have worked more than 238,000 hours. Using the skills and experience attained, 331 participants gained unsubsidized employment after completing the program.

"We know this program is working," said County Executive Kreuser. "It's providing opportunities for at-risk youth, keeping them off the streets and teaching them valuable skills, and it's helping to make our community a safer place for everyone."

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