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Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Job coaches Kai Webb, left, and Jessica Moon work in the Bridge City Mentors office downtown.

Advocacy group works to lower barriers to employment

Bridge City Mentors helps with job placement

By ABBEY McDONALD
The Astorian

There's a new matchmaker in town, specializing in long-term relationships between businesses and job applicants.

Bridge City Mentors, a Portland-based employment advocacy program, has opened a second location in Astoria. It expands the North Coast's limited resources for vocational rehabilitation and job placement.

The job development organization offers free job preparation, mentorship, application assistance and advocacy for people with disabilities, veterans and others facing barriers to employment.

The mentorship begins with application assistance and job placement, and they work with employers to support employees through the first few months after hiring.

Dee Norbury, the group's director, said the decision to expand to Astoria came after she found out the area did not have a job development agency.

"I knew that this was an opportunity to assist our business in growing, but also to really make an impact on this community," Norbury said. "People need jobs and that's our specialty. We're matchmakers. We can totally match employees and applicants with employers who are seeking specific skills."

The organization has contracted with the Oregon Department of Human Services' Vocational Rehabilitation branch, which has a small team in Clatsop County.

Its vocational counselor, Jen Munson, worked for 2 1/2 years to bring Bridge City to Astoria. She said that the contract will allow her to better serve people in the community who have disabilities and address the backlog of applications.

"Prior to Bridge City, I was doing all that sort of partnership myself," Munson said. "Bridge City will do the boots on the ground work."

The business is networking with employers in the community. They have been involved in chamber of commerce events and are meeting with potential clients.

"What we're finding is that everybody is hiring, so we just have to continue meeting with people," said Kai Webb, a mentor at Bridge City. "And I think the best

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Photos by Lydia Ely/The Astorian

The receptionist window of Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare's new Rapid Access Clinic is decorated for the holiday season.

Rapid Access Clinic provides 'mental health first aid'

By ERICK BENGEL
The Astorian

Last summer, an older homeless man approached Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare's new Rapid Access Clinic on W. Bond Street, asking for a cigarette or some change. The staff offered him snacks and coffee.

He kept showing up, a few times a week, striking up conversations with the staff, who would ask him how he was doing. It took about a week for staff to get the man's name from him, so disordered was his speech.

Eventually, he started asking questions. He wanted to know what they did at the clinic.

Weeks after their first interaction, he was in the office of Dragosh Negrea, the clinic manager, who assessed the man, asking him questions to get him enrolled in services.

Negrea was able to connect him with case managers and get him started on mental health medications. He managed to find the man's family, who hadn't heard from him in about a year. And he learned that, until a few years ago, the man had been fairly high-functioning.

The Rapid Access Clinic, which operates weekdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., is a low-barrier drop-in center for adults 18 and older seeking mental health care or treatment for drug and alcohol addiction. No appointment needed, no insurance necessary



The clinic is a low-barrier drop-in center.

— though the staff can help clients sign up.

The clinic provides what Meghan McKee, the outpatient services director, called "mental health first aid." As long as someone isn't being violent or needing immediate medical care, that person can be seen.

Housed in a former Social Security office, the clinic had a soft opening last month but has been quietly open since July. When the current phase of the coronavirus pandemic passes, staff may hold a community event,

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Native American entrepreneur opens vintage collective

A vibrant new store on Commercial

By ETHAN MYERS
The Astorian

Curious shoppers who peered into an old building downtown over the years can now venture inside —and buy an affordable, vintage shirt while they are at it.

Interest in the new store has built just on the mystery of the building alone, said Nathan Crowchild, the founder of Rain Town Vintage Collective. The location, which formerly housed Abeco Office Systems on Commercial Street, now holds a number of items from Portland's Hollywood Vintage.



Nathan Crowchild stands at the counter of Rain Town Vintage Collective in Astoria.

Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Crowchild's vibrant new space is just through the store and down the stairs.

EVERYDAY people

Some people wander in with stories of what the place used to be, while others venture in as eager customers who saw the handmade sign out front.

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