

Programs for youth workers face cuts

By Leslie Mitts
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The after-school program at Workforce Development has been cancelled until January due to funding issues, but students can still find opportunities.

In prior years, the after-school program allowed for up to six students to gain work experience after school.

This year, according to Verleen Kalama, they don't have enough funds for the program.

When they begin the program again in January, she said, the number of positions will be cut as well.

Ordinarily, Kalama said, the program is an incentive for students who do well in school and who are on-track to graduation.

Wayne Miller said the program has assisted many students in the past.

"That's what this program was designed for, to help them," he explained.

The after-school program placed students in employment positions in places like the community center, Indian Health Services or Early Childhood Education.

Part of the funding problem, Kalama says, lies in the requirement for retirement funds to be deducted for youth workers.

"It's taken away eight youth slots, which is sad," Kalama said.

Though the positions are decreasing, Kalama hopes to have two or three positions available for students next year.

However, Kalama said, hours that the students would have worked with the after-school program can be replaced during the summer.

She said, "If they utilize that then it's going to affect their summer hours."

Without the program, it leaves the students more hours to work during the summer, Kalama explained.

Many students used the after-school program during prior spring terms of school, she said, when they had half a day free and needed to fill their time.

During school students are only allowed to work 20 hours per week. But, Miller said, "It's still a big plus for them because it keeps them busy."

According to Kalama, "We always try to instill in them to get that work experience while they can."

Students are able to use their work experience to gain high school credit—both in the after-school program and in the summer work program.

To do so, all students need to do is speak with the school to work counselor, Guff Thorpe, at Madras High School.

"We mailed out certificates to

them and it has their total hours," Kalama said.

The students only need documented proof of the time they worked, and can either use the printed certificates or contact Workforce Development to obtain copies of their timesheets.

Last summer Workforce Development helped 150 youth workers to find employment.

Though they reduced the number of workers in the summer as well, Kalama said Kah-Nee-Ta had a youth program and employed 40 tribal members this summer.

In Kalama's opinion, "That was excellent."

Other youth workers found employment with the Natural Resources Department, which employed about 15 students.

"That's an accredited program through Natural Resources," Miller said. "They get credit for high school and it benefits the students."

The Workforce Development program does have opportunities for youth who are not in school—those who are 17-years-old or older.

"That's for the under-employed, economically-disadvantaged, other Indians," Kalama said.

With that program, males have to show that they have also signed up for the selective service.

The Workforce Development program is also planning the annual youth conference for 2007, which will take place during spring break in March.

During the conference, they invite colleges and worksites to give information to students during a career fair.

"It gives them an opportunity to meet and greet college representatives," Kalama said.

In addition, they invite representatives from the armed forces during the two-day conference.

Kalama added, "Usually if we have the budget for it we bring in some speakers."

She advised students to watch for fliers and registration forms for the conference and to inquire in January about the after-school program.

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