

High schoolers gain experience in Great Promise Partnership

Recently, five local high school students began working in Unified Government departments as part of the Great Promise Partnership (GPP), a program aimed at helping at-risk students complete high school while simultaneously gaining real-world job skills and training.

Initially a project of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, GPP is now a non-profit that works with both public and private agency partners to provide students with mentorship, positive workplace experiences, and encouragement to finish high school, as well as the



Howell McKinnon works with Minnesha Chester, a Great Promise Partnership student who is learning about the 800 MHz radio system and its functions.

promise to help prepare them for further education, military service, or the workforce after graduation.

Each student currently participating in the program with the Unified Government began by

choosing from a number of available job descriptions and interviewing with the applicable department. Currently, students are working in five departments: **Central Services, Human Resources,**

Leisure Services, Organizational Development, and Transit.

As part of the program, department staff serve in supervisory and mentorship capacities for students to guide them through daily work activities, train them on job responsibilities, and model a real-life work relationship.

Mentors meet regularly with their students to offer encouragement and support, as well as to provide a listening ear concerning other school and life issues. These meetings are focused on students' goals, outside interests, and challenges.

"My main role is to listen to my student and ask her questions about how she is doing and what her dreams are," explains **Catherine Bennett** (Organizational Development).

Aside from job training, the program challenges students to maintain good grades, figure out how get to and from work, and arrive on time. They learn proper work behavior, develop confidence, and how to manage a work load.

Watching students grow both personally and professionally has been rewarding for ACC staff as well. **Lori Pollock** (HR) is supervisor and mentor to **Anjil Boyd**, the first GPP student to work in the Unified Government.

"It is a pure joy to work with Anjil. She is a hard worker and has contagious energy," says Pollock. "I have enjoyed being able to share in her triumphs both academically and in the workplace."

Students are given real and meaningful work, making them valuable employees and team members. **Minnesha Chester**, for example, works in Central Services learning about the 800 MHz radio system, its operation, and legal requirements involved.

"I like helping officers when they have a problem with their radio," she says.

Students have proven to be hard-working individuals with a good work ethic and an eagerness to learn and help. "Our student loves having a list to work from so she can cross each task off," says Bennett.

"Minnesha has been very motivated to learn from the beginning and seems eager to learn more," adds **Howell McKinnon** (Central Services).

In June, the Unified Government received an inaugural GPP Cornerstone Community Trailblazer Award at the Georgia Municipal Association's annual convention for embracing the program's mission. A future goal of the program is to allow students to rotate departments in order to gain work experience across the breadth of the organization.