

Summer youth programs prove everyone is a winner

by Gloria Welton

Two youth programs held in a total of six locations across the Island this summer have proven to be of great value to the participants and the community.

The **STAR** and **SEAM** programs were held in West Prince (Alberton and Westisle Composite High School) as well as in Summerside, Charlottetown, St. Peter's, and Morell.

Both programs helped support high school students in grades 10, 11 and 12 who are returning to high school by offering career direction and encouragement to make successful life choices.

"These programs are a win/win for everyone involved," says **Chris Shaw**, Alberton Coordinator. "Along with getting paid for seven weeks, the youth learned a lot of skills which will help them in the future. Also, the community got to see the youth being very productive and helpful. They did things for the communities that were long overdue.

"Community members couldn't believe the great services we were offering, such as weeding gardens, picking up litter, and odd jobs for the second hand clothing store and the food bank," says Chris.

One youth participant talked about a gentleman who was so thankful to get some help cleaning up the site of a non-profit organization. Another youth talked about cleaning windows for a business owner who said she hadn't seen through the windows in a long time. "She was so pleased with our work, she offered to provide a letter of reference for us," says the youth.

The programs also worked on building skills in areas such as financial literacy, and discussed information on careers of interest and the steps to take to get into those careers.

There were a lot of moving parts to these summer programs that had a ripple effect. "The youth couldn't say enough about how much they learned, and how they enjoyed and felt supported and a part of the program," says **Jenna MacDonald**, Westisle Coordinator.

The Westisle SEAM program tackled a garden project called "Good Food, Good Health." The goal was to grow veggies to donate to the Westisle Composite High School cafeteria in September.

"We did lots of exploring to get to know the community by visiting local farms and tourist businesses. We also went on a camping trip and did the R.O.P.E.S. program team building sessions through The Adventure Group in Charlottetown."

Guest speakers such as the RCMP and others came in to discuss their fields of work, and there were many discussions on job search, communication skills, and dealing with anxiety. They also did personality assessments to get to know themselves better, to learn how to manage conflicts, and to discover what careers best suit each personality.

Carla Boswall, Summerside Coordinator for the SEAM program, says the programs are a place to help youth build self-confidence, develop job-ready skills, and offer many other supports around managing life challenges.

What youth said about the summer programs

- "It was very interesting and fun."
- "A great learning experience."
- "It was more than I expected. It gave us more opportunities than we are offered in school. I think the work we did in the classroom and in the community gave us great life skills."
- "It felt like being in a very supportive family in a tight-knit setting."
- "It was more than a program. This was something I will use later on, almost like a discovery of myself and what I want to do for my financial future and what I want to do as a person."
- "It helped to address and face some of my fears."
- "This program was completely worth it."
- "It was a way to earn while you learn."
- "It will help us out in the long-run."
- "The life skills we learned were more important than I realized at the time."
- "It is something for my resumé, and now I have references."
- "Even though the program is short, it offers a lot of benefits."

Comments from some Team Leads hired to work with the youth

Natasha Rayner, STAR program Team Lead, is in the LPN program at Holland College in Summerside. "This was a great opportunity to get experience working with youth as I go through my nursing program. In high school, it is rare to get the life skills training this program offered. It helped open up PEI career options and gave the youth direction to get to their chosen career."



STAR (Start To Apply Right) and SEAM (Skills Enhancement And Mentoring) youth program participants with Coordinators Chris Shaw and Jenna MacDonald, and Team Leads Natasha Rayner and John Gaudet. As a result of discussions held during the program, youth identified careers they want to explore further, such as Welding, Mechanics, Arts/Broadway, Music, LPN/Nursing, Special Needs Educator, Military service, and Video Game Designer.



SEAM (Skills Enhancement And Mentoring) youth program participants from Summerside, Team Lead Tyler Harris, and Coordinator Carla Boswall. "We had 10 youth complete this summer's program," says Barb Broome, East Prince Youth Development Centre. "They received training and support to assist with life management and career planning."

John Gaudet, STAR program Team Lead, has a music and business background. "I took the business program at Holland College in Alberton and was referred to this job by one of my college learning managers.

"This is work I have never done before - working with youth and mentoring in a teaching setting. I wanted the opportunity to build my skills, and I have always wanted to do more in my life that makes a difference.

"This is my community as well, and I knew many of the youth in the program. It was great to get to know them and help out where I could."

Tyler Harris, SEAM program Team Lead, came from a low-income family and is now in his fourth year university.

"While the program offers incredibly valuable life experiences, it is the immeasurable friendships that are created along the way that weave a unique network of support for the youth involved."

For the article about the youth program in Morell, visit www.employmentjourney.com and search **Morell Garden project**.



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