



# High Desert Partnership's Youth Collaborative Offers Opportunities for Career Exploration

Internship program for high school students provides credit and valuable experience

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by Lauren Brown

Burns High School student Merissa Medley has an interest in detective work and investigation. This year, as a senior, she jumped at the chance when she learned about an internship opportunity at the sheriff's office. "I've always been the kind of person who appreciates law enforcement and what they do, so it's just something that I've always been interested in," she said.

The High Desert Partnership's Youth Changing the Community Collaborative (YCTC) has partnered with Burns High School to create the Harney Internship Program, for juniors and seniors in which they can work with local businesses to gain credit, knowledge and experience in various career fields.

## Internship program



According to Denise Rose, the coordinator for the youth collaborative, it all started three years ago during the pandemic when high school students were having trouble obtaining the elective credits they needed because they were not able to attend classes in person. They started with a handful of students and businesses in the fall of 2020, but it has grown considerably in the last couple of years with about 100 students having now gone through the program. Rose said that most of the businesses she has contacted about having an intern have been enthusiastic in their participation. "Our first semester, we had five students, but we had 15 businesses who wanted to take a student and that ratio has continued," she said. "This spring, we have 26 students

participating, and we have 40 businesses who are offering opportunities."

*Pictured: Lacy Tiller at Slater Elementary during her elementary education internship, photo by Brandon McMullen.*

Rose works with Burns High School teacher Roxane Bailey who is a liaison between the high school and the YCTC and helps connect students with the right internship opportunity. Students fill out an application and go through a screening process.

Businesses then interview the students as they would as part of the typical hiring process. "Sometimes it's a very formal interview and other times it's just talking to the student to see if they'll work out," Rose said. Students are required to keep track of their hours. Some internships are paid, and some are unpaid.



Bailey works with students to identify their interests. Rose said that one student who was unsure about doing an internship said one of his hobbies was working on tractors and farm equipment. YCTC set him up with an internship at Kubota this year. He started off as an unpaid intern, however, after a few weeks he was taking Kubota certification classes online and is now on the payroll. Other businesses taking on interns this semester include Harney District Hospital, Hometown Auto and ACW.

*Pictured: Jayson Graham working at his internship at Point S. Photo by Brandon McMullen.*

For BHS senior Medley, the internship at the Harney County Sheriff's Office was the perfect vehicle to spur her interest in law enforcement, and according to Roxane Worley, Harney County Jail Commander, Medley was the perfect candidate as the department's first intern with the YCTC program. "We wanted to get more active in our local schools, and so we were taking steps to go in that direction," Worley said. They met with Rose from the High Desert Partnership and came up with the curriculum for an internship that would give students a good feel for the justice system by spending two weeks in each

department including 9-1-1 dispatch, patrol, corrections and parole and probation. The intern also spends time learning about the proceedings in the district attorney's office as well as the justice and circuit courts. "The criminal justice system is so glamorized on TV, so we wanted to bring a student in to get a broad overview of the justice system as a whole," Worley said. "We want to make sure that they are making some educated decisions too. We want them to get the real view of what it looks like."

Medley has really enjoyed the internship. She likes taking notes and having the opportunity to ask questions. Her favorite part has been going on patrol with deputies, but she was surprised by the amount of paperwork deputies must complete. "When I was in the courthouse for circuit court and justice court, I expected a lot of paperwork, but I don't think I realized how much paperwork the deputies have to do after driving around and figuring something out," she said.

As part of the internship, Medley said she did a mock interview. "They just ran me through a normal interview, but they would stop to teach me how to answer the questions," she said. "That will help prepare me for any kind of interview that I need to do in the future."

After graduation, she plans to attend Treasure Valley Community College where she will play softball and take general studies classes. Then she plans to transfer to Western Oregon University to complete her criminal justice degree and become a police officer. The internship has served to advance her interest in the justice system. "It's really just made me want to do this job even more," she said. She is open to the idea of returning to Harney County once her schooling is complete. "I'm not for certain on that, but I know this community much better than anywhere else obviously," she said.

Rose said this is one of the goals of the program. "Underneath it all it is our hope that students will start to learn about opportunities here instead of just assuming that there's nothing in Harney County for them," she said.

## Career exposure

Marcus Nichols is an instructor at Treasure Valley Community College (TVCC) who teaches classes in natural resources. He said exposure to various career options at the high school level is key in helping students determine a career path. "High school students go into careers that they know are there," he said. In Harney and Malheur counties, students have a lot of exposure to agriculture. "A lot of their family members might work in ag as well as the medical field, so it seems like a lot of the students have that knowledge of those job opportunities."

To introduce students to other career fields, YCTC hosted a career fair at the Harney County Fairgrounds in March. It was geared toward all high school age students in the county, and about 130 students turned out to hear from the 50 agencies that participated. Most of the agencies were from the science, natural resources and medical fields. Rose said that the success of the event prompted people to ask if they could broaden it to include other fields such as education. "We're definitely going to make that an annual event because we had so much good feedback," she said.

Nichols said that the career event provided more than just exposure to career fields. "What made that event really special and unique is that we tried to connect training opportunities that would qualify those high school students for the careers that they were interested in," he said. "We had different college programs that provided training and degrees for those different industries that they were learning about."

He believes that internships are key in getting students exposure to and experience with a potential career. In fact, some TVCC degrees require internships to graduate. "I've always viewed it as a great opportunity for students to get their foot in the door while they are still here," he said. "We really work closely with industry to try and make sure those opportunities exist so that students can get their start before they leave college."

## Youth outreach

Rose said one of YCTC's goals is to increase opportunities for youths from preschool age clear through and after high school graduation. She has been working with Hines Middle School teacher Bryce Tiernan, who teaches career electives. "We're doing things like here's why you need a resume, here's what a resume looks like and here are some things you can put on a resume even if you've never had a job," Rose said. They also held a mini career week, which featured a Harney County Veterinary Clinic, Doverspike Beef, PMC Arts and Culture Foundation, VooDoo Stitchery and the Harney County Sheriff's Department.

YCTC is also looking at ways to provide opportunities to grade school age students, at-risk teens who may need extra help finishing high school as well as 18-24-year-olds who have graduated high school but aren't certain about a career path.

At a youth summit last fall, Rose said the YCTC featured locals who have made a conscious effort to return to Harney County for their careers. There were business owners, agency employees and hospital employees. "Even if your career pathway takes you to college, we want our students to know that they don't absolutely have to be someplace else," Rose said. "They can get their degree, get their experience for a couple of years and return to live here and be part of what makes Harney County great."

*This article is provided by High Desert Partnership; a Harney County nonprofit convening and supporting six collaboratives including the Youth Changing The Community Collaborative.*

