

Zion Township's Summer Work Program relies on whole community for success

Each year, over 200 youth apply to work at Zion Township and around 75 are hired, depending on the available placements. The program is governed by the African Proverb – "It takes a village to raise a child" because it relies on participation from local officials, non-profit organizations, and the community at large to make it successful.

SWP calls on our community to instill values, ethics, responsibility and a sense of purpose and hope to our 14- and 15-year-old youth. The purpose is to prevent youth from becoming dependent on public assistance programs in the future because they have been trained to obtain and maintain employment.

The most important lesson that youth gain from this program is that you have to work in order to get paid (yes, they can and do get fired). This program trains them to become responsible, productive, and proud citizens in our community.

The program is divided into two parts. Two-thirds of the youth apply at Zion Township with an application, parent permission and a letter of recommendation.

They are interviewed and, if chosen, placed at various non-profit agencies throughout our community who have agreed to participate as a work training site, such as the Zion Park District, the Zion-Benton Public Library, Northpointe Resources, CAP Daycamp, Zion Elementary Summer School, GreenPath, Love INC, Community Resources for Education and Wellness



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Summer Work Program with Zion Police Chief Wayne Brooks. The Zion Police Dept. provides work opportunities for the Summer Work Program.

(CREW), The Grove at the Lake, the Zion Police Department, the Zion Assessor's Office, the Z-BTHS business office, the Boys and Girls Club of Lake County and Zion-Benton Children's services.

The youth who are not chosen are placed on a waiting list and are picked to work if a placement becomes available, but they have gained the experience of applying and interviewing for a job. Because the majority of the program is based around learning how to work, these youth are paid by Zion Township as interns making 70 percent of the minimum wage.

The other one-third of the youth are employed through the Lake County Workforce Development Summer Youth Employment Program. These at-risk youth apply directly through Lake County and the family must meet the County's low income

guidelines. Applicants are selected on a lottery system and paid minimum wage by the county.

These youth are placed onto Zion Township's Community Work Crews, where supervisors that the Township hires for the summer are given community assignments to complete, such as painting playground equipment, cleaning lockers at the schools, Adopt-A-Highway pickup, yardwork for senior community homeowners, and more.

These youth often times require more patience and supervision than youth placed at non-profit agencies.

All parents must attend an orientation with the youth so they can also understand what is expected of their children and reinforce the values at home.

All youth then attend orientation and a day of training, where they learn financial management skills

and basic soft office skills.

They are drug tested and, if positive, given the opportunity to continue working if they attend and complete a substance abuse education program at CREW.

If we can reach our youth early on, we will have a much higher percentage of productive youth joining our workforce in the near future. There is a strict discipline procedure, as we are only hurting these youth if we do not correct unacceptable behavior.

Please notify Zion Township at 847-872-2811 immediately to identify a youth who is not acting appropriately, respectfully or in accordance with the established guidelines so that they may be held accountable.

If the Township is not told about an incident or is unable to identify who it was, they have lost the opportunity to teach the youth a valuable lesson. If the Township is notified as the situation is occurring, it can be addressed immediately.

The Township appreciates the non-profit agencies and community members who are committed to ensuring our youth are given an opportunity to learn what it takes to succeed in the workplace. For some, the most valuable lesson they will learn is that you can run out of chances, get fired and lose the paycheck that you were counting on.

If you are interested in reading how this program has impacted previous participants, please check out the testimonials section on the Web site at ziontownship.org.