

## Goodwill puts faith in power of work

By JODIE TILLMAN

Published June 4, 2007

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The transformation of Ray Chrisley continued over eight-hour days and five-hour nights, at the front register of a drugstore and in the back of pickup trucks at an auto detail shop.

The mere steadiness of work, of showing up at an appointed hour and staying until another, of interacting with strangers, of getting weekly paychecks: These things have helped change Chrisley from a teenager who, in his own estimation, "didn't care about anything" to a young man who wants an education, a career, a home, a good life.

"I realized that if I didn't grow up and take responsibility for myself," said Chrisley, 19, "that I wasn't going to go anywhere."

Such transformations don't happen without help. Chrisley was one of the first Pasco County teenagers who participated in Goodwill Industries-Suncoast Inc.'s Project Bridge program.

Paid for with a \$1-million federal grant, Project Bridge helps young people who have gotten off to rough starts learn how to be employable and find jobs.

The program serves Pasco, Pinellas and Hillsborough counties. In Pasco, the program is for juvenile offenders, usually those enrolled at the New Port Richey Marine Institute.

Participants, who are ages 16 to 21, learn how to put together resumes, how to interview and how to dress. Work force coach Scott Furbay goes along on shopping trips and has even lingered outside kids' job interviews to provide moral support.

But the key parts of the program are short-term internships and job shadowing at local businesses. Goodwill pays the participants a stipend as part of their on-the-job experience.

So far, about 20 Pasco businesses, mostly retail and construction, work with Goodwill to give teenagers a peek into their worlds. Goodwill is looking for more, especially in the manufacturing industry.

What do businesses get out of it? Furbay says his basic pitch is this: These kids will come looking for work one of these days. Why not let them get a feel for the industry now, while they've got a support system behind them?

Furbay, who drives around Pasco making cold calls to human resource departments, says the No. 1 objection he hears from business types is concern about liability. He tries to work around that objection by suggesting two-hour tours or presentations rather than the more typical 60-hour internships.

Nobody is promising a job will fix everything. Cubicle jokes and the "working for the weekend" mentality are alive and well for good reasons. But as Furbay and others point out, work may give focus and hope to those with neither.

"Believe in the power of work" is the way Goodwill puts it.

Ray Chrisley understands that. Once he was a teenager at the Marine Institute for reasons he's embarrassed to talk about anymore. Now he is juggling three jobs plus courses at Pasco-Hernando Community College. He bought a house and put down some wood floors. He's got a long-term goal to work in law enforcement, and he recently got good news about more immediate prospects: He's been promoted to night manager at the drugstore.

For more information about Project Bridge, contact Michael Ann Harvey at 727 523-1512, ext. 1010.

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