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INTERNSHIPS

Internship effort aimed at helping teens get ahead in job market

     

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In a move to boost job and career opportunities for youth, the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County

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and an array of partners are sponsoring 160 internships that will pay 15- to 20-year-old employees a total of \$250,000 this summer.

The internships, mainly for students of color, low-income families or first-generation college students, will pay between \$9 and \$15 an hour to work for the city of Madison, Dane County, nonprofits and 33 businesses such as CUNA Mutual Group, Metcalfe's Market, Saris Cycling Group, BMO Harris Bank and UW Hospital and Clinics.

The internships aren't intended to be just busy work, Boys & Girls Club CEO Michael Johnson said.

"I think its important that our kids gain meaningful employment over the summer months," he said. "We want to find them jobs where they can potentially learn a skill, or where a light bulb goes off" about a career.

Examples of the internships include learning about marketing magazines for American Girl, sound and recording training at WORT radio and observing surgeries with UW Health.

"We (want to make) sure our kids have really meaningful opportunities to explore a career path and to explore what it really takes to get into those kinds of careers," said Nichelle Nichols, Boys & Girls Club chief academic officer.

The initiative, which builds on existing efforts, was announced at an upbeat news conference Wednesday at CUNA Mutual by Johnson and a host of city movers and shakers including Mayor Paul Soglin, schools Superintendent Jennifer Cheatham and others.

Speakers invited more in the business community to participate, with the hope of being able to announce 1,000 positions for the summer of 2015.

"We are going to make sure every teenager in the city has a summer internship job that pays and is a pathway to a career," Soglin said.

The city alone is providing 21 new internships to teens who will work in one of 16 agencies, to be

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called the Wanda Fullmore Youth Employment Initiative after the **recently retired mayor's office clerk** who started with the city as a teen and went on to become the face and voice of the mayor's office for nearly four decades. The new effort is in addition to roughly \$300,000 in city funding for six agencies to create employment opportunities for 520 teens this year.

The initiative addresses troubling data about teenage and young adult employment, especially among minorities.

As the employment rates of young whites rebound with the economy, the rates for young blacks continue to decline. Since 2008, the employment rate of blacks ages 16-24 in Wisconsin dropped from 40 percent to 31 percent in 2012, state Department of Workforce Development data show. The percentage of whites the same age dropped from 66 percent in 2008 to 57 percent in 2011, but increased to 60 percent in 2012 — the most recent data available.

In 2012, the state's unemployment rate for young blacks was 33 percent, compared to 13 percent for whites. In Dane County, teenagers 16-19 are four times more likely to be unemployed than the county's general population, the data say.

Those jarring figures hit a nerve with community leaders, prompting the Boys & Girls Club to lead an effort to beef up the number of internships.

"We know that internships are not just about earning money and a summer job," said Mary Burke, a Madison School Board member, gubernatorial candidate and co-chair of a Boys & Girls Club college readiness program steering committee. "It's about developing lifelong skills."

Carlos Hernandez, 19, a Memorial High school graduate now attending Madison Area Technical College, has had three internships and will be doing another this summer at CUNA.

"It's been really good," he said of his experiences. "It's helped me focus on what I want to do."

The effort revealed Wednesday includes 91 internships with Boys & Girls Club programs, community centers and private businesses; 24 with the city and county; and 45 with the school district through its Madison School & Community Recreation's Junior Leaders program. Of the total



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160 internships, 71 are new this year.

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