

NEWS RELEASE

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Youth Get Experience as Digital Literacy Coaches and in Summer Jobs

When a dozen teenagers went into Idaho libraries last summer to help people navigate the world of computers, they so impressed the librarians that now they want 30 young people to serve as digital literacy coaches this summer.

"Our goal with providing digital literacy coaches is to help the unemployed increase their computer skills," State Librarian Ann Joslin said. "These coaches support local staff and help library users make the most of available training and e-government resources for finding work."

The unemployment rate for Idaho teenagers last year was over 20 percent so the digital literacy coaching jobs and other jobs through the Idaho Department of Labor's Idaho Youth Corps offer a helping hand to young people, especially those from low-income homes. More than 140 participated last year working not just in libraries but for private businesses, the U.S. Forest Service, state parks, farmers markets, school districts and other organizations.

Levi Burklund was one of the digital learning coaches in 2011. Like many in his generation, he started learning computer-keyboarding skills in elementary school. He earned his GED last year so his job in Caldwell helped him save tuition for college.

The economy is finally on the road to recovery, but the prospects are not much better than last year for young people in a labor market still flooded with older, more skilled and experienced workers.

Digital literacy coaches are paid from Idaho Department of Labor Workforce Investment Act funds and a federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program grant received by the Idaho Commission for Libraries. The digital literacy coaching program is open to high school graduates and college students from low-income families. In addition to earning the minimum wage, students learn workplace skills like punctuality, initiative and strategies for developing good relationships with coworkers.

Ann Joslin of the Idaho Commission for Libraries is encouraging local libraries to host a digital literacy coach because of the benefits they receive, especially in small communities where the libraries have a single librarian trying to serve patrons who rely on the library as the community's central cultural and educational resource.

Over 70 percent of Idaho's public libraries serve as the only free source of Internet access in their communities. Fifty-five of Idaho's least connected libraries are participating in the Idaho Commission for Libraries' two-year "online @ your library" project, which includes computer upgrades, faster access to the Internet and online resources, free access to job skills training and adult basic education and informal learning resources for children.

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Other programs funded through Labor's partnership with the libraries include workshops to introduce Idaho's librarians to Labor's job search services, the development of an online job search workbook and a series of video tips on how to look for work. The online module, "Maximize Your Job Search," is accessible from the department's website at labor.idaho.gov/jobsearch and on public access computers in libraries across the state.

The digital literacy coach and Idaho Summer Youth Corps program are only two of several services provided by the Idaho Department of Labor for youth. Others include:

- **School Support** - Tutoring support, leadership development or earning a GED, targeted for at-risk, low-income, out-of-school young people 16 to 21. Funds are limited, and eligibility restrictions apply.
- **Job Search Assistance** - Students can search job listings, create an online profile or upload a résumé searchable by Idaho employers.
- **Idaho Career Information System** - Career information, skills tests, education and training opportunities and career portfolios at labor.idaho.gov/CareerInfo.
- **Work Experience** - At-risk, low-income, out-of-school youth 16 to 21 can work in a city library, out on the range, in a national forest or as an intern for an Idaho company. Eligibility restrictions apply. Dozens of Idaho employers, schools and other sponsors also offer apprenticeships or on-the-job training programs.
- **Volunteer Opportunities** - Students can open doors, give back to the community, gain some work experience and maybe even earn some money by joining an AmeriCorps program or volunteering with Serve Idaho.
- **Career Fairs** - Labor's local offices support career fairs held by schools throughout the state. Check the calendar at labor.idaho.gov or contact the nearest of 25 local offices to see if one is planned.

Students interested in summer employment opportunities or serving as a digital literacy coach should contact their local Idaho Department of Labor Workforce Investment Act youth coordinator. A directory of local offices can be found on the upper right hand corner of Labor's website at labor.idaho.gov.

Librarians interested in hosting a digital literacy coach should contact the Idaho Commission for Libraries at (208) 334-2150.

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Editors / News Directors: Examples of students working in libraries northern and north central Idaho can be found below. Electronic images of digital literacy coaches working in Idaho's libraries are also available. For copies, please contact Teresa Lipus (208) 334-2150.

2011 Idaho Digital Literacy Coach Pilot Program Photos / Community Examples

GRANGEVILLE: When the Grangeville Centennial Library replaced "two old clunkers" with nine new computers, the news made the local papers, librarian Edie Lustig said. But as the library's single staffer, she juggles budgeting, cataloguing, keeping up with new releases and organizing library programs. She is not always able to answer all the computer questions asked by the 100 library patrons who visit on an average day.

"And if they can't get on the computers, they can't do job searches or even fill out unemployment forms," Lustig said. Digital literacy coaches offer a potentially invaluable resource for a library like hers, she said.

SANDPOINT: Elise Tuma, literacy coordinator at the East Bonner County Library in Sandpoint agreed the program is beneficial to the community. Tabitha Stewart - who went on to become a North Idaho College student - helped patrons learn how to use email and write résumés using Microsoft Word templates. Those are simple tasks — unless you have never done them before and are not comfortable around computers.

PECK: Morgan Sweeney, the digital literacy coach at the Peck Community Library, became an integral part of the library this summer, librarian Doreen Schmidt said. Peck sits on the Clearwater River between Lewiston and Orofino. Its library has become a satellite of the town's one-room school, which serves 28 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. Many of those kids spend their afternoons at the library.

Sweeney, 17, who left her job last fall to start her freshman year at Lewis-Clark State College, not only helped kids with computer skills but also to use the computer to broaden their cultural horizons.

"Many of the children in this community grow up never planning to go to college," Schmidt said. "Because Morgan was going, she helped them to start thinking about that as a possibility for themselves. She would click on the LCSC website, for example, and show students the classes she was going to take or where they could take practice tests to prepare for standardized tests."

Sweeney was closer to being a peer to the students than a teacher, and that was an advantage, Schmidt said. Older adults would see Sweeney working with young kids on computers and get inspired to do the same with their own children.

Without the program, the Peck library would not have had the resources to hire Sweeney, Schmidt said. She hopes she will be able to find a new coach to continue Sweeney's work.

IMAGES AVAILABLE - For copies, please contact Teresa Lipus (208) 334-2150.



CUTLINES (from left to right):

Aberdeen area residents go online at their library to connect with family and friends.

Idaho Youth Corps coach Jesseca Alvarado points out new online resources to Omar Alvarez and Mayor Terry Greenman at the Burley Public Library

Oakley Online Guest Book: Oakley District Library is Joshua Pecchia's connection to games and homework help.