

# ADOLESCENTS IN YOUR WORKPLACE

## **Why are school-work opportunities important for young people?**

As adolescents go through the transformation from child to adult, they spend a lot of time exploring future roles and careers. Experiences at this age can lay the foundation for successful employment and a productive life in adulthood. School-work experiences provide students with access to the skills, knowledge, and attitudes they need in the workplace. As a result, students are better able to set realistic and obtainable goals for themselves.

Learning in the workplace helps students develop good employability and citizenship skills and behaviours. Some of these competencies include effective resource management, working co-operatively, acquiring, using and managing information, understanding organizations and how they function, working with different technologies, and strategies for problem solving.

## **Does my organization have anything to offer?**

Every organization has a great deal to offer students who could ultimately be future employees. Every work experience can influence a student's confidence, educational goals, career choice, or commitment to stay in school.

## **Will teenagers fit into my organization?**

There is no doubt that teenagers bring their own joys and challenges. The physical, emotional, and social changes they are experiencing make each and every one of them a unique entity with unique characteristics and needs. They may be highly energetic, active, outspoken, and impulsive. They are also enthusiastic, and eager to please, anxious to learn, and excited about new experiences and interacting with other people. Their preference for active over passive learning means you can engage them fully in appropriately designed learning activities. Working closely with their teacher will help you to understand the characteristics of the age group, any specific student needs, and how to plan a meaningful learning experience.

## **How can we provide a meaningful learning experience for the students?**

You and your employees have a multitude of relevant skills to share with students. This is an opportunity to refine those skills and develop some new ones. Some common functions include:

- training, e.g., instructing student about safety requirement
- mentoring, e.g., advising individual students
- supervising, e.g., overseeing student performance
- co-ordinating, e.g., organizing work schedules

In advance of the experience, talk with the teacher to ensure that you have all the information you require about the co-op program. Identify the work skills and learning expectations to be pursued at the workplace, and how they relate to classroom learning. Clarify the expectations for the employer, the student, and the school. Communicate with the teacher and the student with regard to how things are going and make adjustments as needed.

### **Can we involve students with special needs?**

Absolutely! Although students with special needs may need additional, personalized attention when it comes to planning and monitoring their involvement, there is no doubt that they have the makings of reliable and loyal employees. You will want to work closely with their teacher(s), spend time getting to know their strengths, and make plans to work with their individual needs to build success.

The classroom teacher will be a key resource for you in the area. In general all adolescents benefit from:

- positive social interaction with adults and peers
- structured and clear boundaries, and expectations
- opportunities for creative expression
- meaningful participation in small groups
- activities involving some choice

### **What will this cost us?**

Generally, the main costs are time and people. You may need to provide additional meeting and training time for staff who are supervising the student in their learning. Time will also be needed for the supervisor to meet with the teacher on a regular basis. Except for apprenticeships, students are not customarily paid for these activities.