

# Rural students sample business life in program

More than 100 students from rural villages in Northwest and western Alaska spent two-week sessions this summer learning and working in jobs and experiencing life in the big city.

The tours were part of the Vocational Exploration Program to help high school students learn job skills, gain job experiences in the villages and explore job possibilities in the larger communities.

The students work part-time for private employers such as Burger King, Safeway and McDonalds and some other businesses. Their training included visits to hotels, police and fire stations, hospitals, radio stations and job service offices.

They also sampled some "fun" offerings of the big city including movies, roller skating, swimming, zoos and museums.

The students stayed with families recruited through area churches.

Selawik teacher Chuck Johnston, who founded the Vocational Exploration Program, says, "Employment is one of Bush Alaska's largest problems. Rural people don't get hired for jobs because of their lack of job knowledge and socialization. The beauty of this program is that the work is the same in the rural or the urban setting," Johnston added. "The kids learn punctuality, good work habits, and 'calling-in' when they're late, things that are often more important to work success than a high level of skill."

While the private employers directly paid the young people, CETA funding made possible the plane fares, transportation around town, adult coordinators and a final banquet. The CETA sponsors were Mauneluk Manpower in Kotzebue, Kawerak in Nome, and the Nome and Bethel offices of the State CETA Division, Department of Community and Regional Affairs.

It was their first trip to a large city for many of the young people, and it provided their first paid work experience. For most of the Selawik young people, it highlighted a year of part-time jobs in the village. Nine graduates of Selawik High School worked in month-long

jobs in Anchorage, living and traveling independently.

Selawik high school graduate Lydia Foxglove worked two and a half weeks for the Tundra Times this summer, assisting the circulation manager.

Several bush teachers worked with Chuck Johnston as coordinators in Anchorage and Fairbanks, transporting the students from their boarding homes to their jobs, driving them to special tours and supervising the recreational activities.

Nineteen of the young workers were special education students. Four were given work aptitude tests at the Employment and Training Center of Alaska in Anchorage. All worked in part-time jobs.

Rick McCrum, their coordinator, said, "Special ed kids often have a better chance for success in vocational areas than in academic. Lots of times they're left out (of this kind of program), but they can benefit as much as their non-handicapped peers."

The students enjoyed shopping in Anchorage and Fairbanks and it provided the occasion for some lessons in comparative buying. "When they first arrived, 'the students tended to buy the first thing they saw. However, they were very surprised to find that they might get a better deal if they checked other stores, watched the newspaper or waited a day until a sale started,'" wrote Kenneth Kristenson in a final report.

"Consumer buying was quite new to them, and several didn't understand why goods and services cost more in rural areas. We also discussed the psychology behind a store having sales, what they advertise, and how large corporations work with branch stores," Kristenson said.

Fifty-eight of the students were from the NANA region, from the villages of Selawik, Kotzebue, Buckland and Deering.

The Bering Straits region sent 29 young people from Nome, Shishmaref, Elim, Koyuk, Shaktoolik, Unalakleet, St. Michael, Gambell and Savoonga.

Fifteen students from Hooper Bay also participated.