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## News

### Serving at-risk students

By ANTHONY TROJAN Daily Light staff writer  
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The SkillsNET Foundation recently began its first Youth Career Summit, a program designed to help the county's young people enter and flourish in the workforce.

The program, which has a rolling enrollment policy, teaches students both job and life skills.

While the program teaches students how to use modern office technology, it simultaneously teaches them how to develop good habits; while students learn how to write a resume, they are also taught leadership and how to overcome obstacles in their paths.



This is the first such effort by the foundation, with the summit designed to "lay the groundwork for future programs," said Andrew Miller, SkillsNET Foundation's associate director.

Miller added that while participation in the eight-week program was fluctuating (there are about five students currently), the program has, according to his characterization, "received a lot of positive feedback" from local businesses, the Rotary Club and the Waxahachie Chamber of Commerce.

Classes meet from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Thursdays, and individualized attention is available on Tuesdays during the same time. Formerly, the classes met Tuesdays as well as Thursday, but that schedule was amended to the present version. The foundation's summit is available to students countywide.

The mission of SkillsNET Foundation, as related by director Ted Johnson, is "to help people build a career, not just hold a job."

Johnson said the mission entails exploration of different fields of employment, applying for and obtaining employment, and then maintaining positions once they are attained.

He emphasized that SkillsNET Foundation is a nonprofit entity independent of SkillsNET Corporation that aims to help the at-risk population (such as juvenile offenders, single mothers and children in foster care) in addition to other populations from every socio-economic and educational level.

Miller said one of the students enrolled in the program is a college student who is attempting to discover what he wants to do for the rest of his life. However, Miller noted the summit has a wider focus than just career

preparation.

The summit also will help students learn what SkillsNET terms “soft skills,” which they say businesses attribute the successes of their employees.

“Soft skills,” Miller said, include social, inter-personal relationship, problem solving, decision making and dealing with criticism skills.

Johnson said the program also hopes to expand its services soon to include courses for parents, who he states have expressed their desires to help their children develop better work ethics and money management skills among other areas of concern.

The foundation would also like to host a program similar to the summit that focuses on individuals about to exit the juvenile detention and child welfare (foster children) systems.

“One of the things we emphasize is appearance,” says Miller. “We try to get the students used to wearing slacks and at least business casual attire, getting them into that professional mindset.”

Coordinated by Andrea Green, the foundation’s project manager, the program has several business executive volunteers who donate their time to help students interested in areas such as sales and marketing learn more about those careers by allowing the students to take a closer look into the “real world” of such professions.

The students are provided with instruction in their areas of need, interest and aptitude, all of which are determined by a battery of assessment tools including software programs, online tools, personality tests, skills and abilities tests, and SkillsNET’s “Job Profiler” program, which allows students to examine specific occupations and their necessary skills and qualifications.

Miller said the program itself would undergo an assessment after the class ends Oct. 26, at which time any necessary changes will be determined. Any changes should be instituted by next spring when the foundation plans to conduct the summit again.

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