

Ukiah and Teens

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Teenagers and summer. We've all been one, have one, or know one. For teenagers, summer can be a time of rest, a break from homework and busy schedules, a time to travel with family or friends; and for many, a time to try out the work force for the first time. In Umatilla County, 8 out of 12 libraries, as well as the Umatilla County Special Library District office, had paid teen interns working for them. Out of these 8 teens working in libraries around the county, 5 were funded by federal monies from the Institute of Museum and Library Services routed through the State Library of Oregon. The State Library offers a grant program with \$4000 to public libraries in Oregon to hire a teen for the summer. The money is used to pay the teens, as well as to fund a project of the teens choosing. This summer the teens projects ranged from helping with marketing outreach (UCSLD's teen), to organizing and running an "instrument petting zoo" in collaboration with the Oregon East Symphony (Adams), a 3-day anime club (Umatilla), a Color War (Stanfield), a teen podcast (Pendleton), a tie-die day (Echo), and a full-blown Dungeon and Dragons project (Ukiah).

The grant allows these teens the opportunity to make summer money, but more importantly to learn how libraries work, the mission of libraries. And perhaps most importantly, the chance to plan and implement a project of their own. In the case of Ukiah's teen intern, Betsy Wallgren, she took on the daunting task of creating a Dungeons and Dragon's world, recruiting other teens to participate, doing the background research and set up, and finally facilitating a round of Dungeon and Dragons that lasted over 3 hours. If you are like me and have no idea what a game of Dungeon and Dragons entails, let me tell you – it's not for the faint of heart. There are hours of prep, setting up the world, creating a map of the world, gathering players to create detailed backgrounds for each one, and then creating (and remembering) how the world runs. When the game begins, the facilitator





oversees every aspect of the game and makes decisions constantly on the fly about how the players' actions change the outcomes of the game. It requires on your feet thinking, good memory and recall, a sense of humor and the ability to take charge of a group of people (teens I will remind you) and keep control of the environment. I'd never seen a game before and was duly impressed with Betsy as she ran her first ever game as the facilitator.

In a small town like Ukiah, the kind of opportunity this grant offers is invaluable. Ukiah has very limited activities for students of any age, and a program like this offers summer employment, a chance for a teen to learn new skills and a new industry (the world of libraries), a chance to lead, and to learn invaluable life skills as a result. This is the second year in a row the library director in Ukiah, Dustin Schock, has run this grant program. The time and effort he put into growing teens in his tiny town is astonishing! There's nothing like it, particularly in a place as small and remote as Ukiah.

This teen grant is one small way libraries in Eastern Oregon and across the state use small amounts of federal and state dollars to make a big impact. At least one of the teens this summer is now interested in libraries as a career, and all were given the chance to earn money, learn new skills, and develop as members of a productive society. Libraries continue to give back to their respective communities, and this is another example of ways libraries impact on the world around them in a positive way. For more information on these libraries and their summer programs check out their websites and social media pages or visit www.ucslid.org.