Let’s Build What’s Next, Hendricks County!

WestNext is Hendricks County’s collaborative approach to connecting students, schools, employers, and community partners to create stronger career-connected learning opportunities for students and a stronger talent pipeline for our community.

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is an important part of that work, giving students opportunities to explore careers, build real-world skills, and learn directly from local professionals through experiences like career exploration, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and other hands-on opportunities.
Whether you can host an intern, welcome students for a tour, share your career in a classroom, provide a job shadow, or simply start a conversation, there is a place for you in WestNext.

See the spotlight below to learn how Hendricks County partners are helping students discover what’s possible.

Ready to take the next step?
Visit https://hendrickscollegenetwork.org/westnext/
or scan the QR code to learn more!

WORK BASED LEARNING SPOTLIGHT

Sonja Builds Confidence and Community Through Library Internship



What started as a graphic design class at Plainfield High School turned into a meaningful, real-world opportunity for Sonja to grow both personally and professionally.

Now a freshman at DePauw University, Sonja is studying history and political science with plans to minor in graphic design. While her career path is still taking shape, she knows one thing for certain, she wants to work in a role that impacts her community.

That mindset led her to participate in a Work-Based Learning internship, through Plainfield High School, where she connected with the Plainfield-Guilford Township Public Library. This partnership, supported by Plainfield High School and library leadership, opened the door for Sonja to apply her classroom learning in a real-world setting.

What began as an internship quickly became something more. “It ended up being a really awesome time,” Sonja shared.

During her time at the library, Sonja worked on a variety of design and communication projects. One of her most impactful contributions was helping create the library's annual report, a project that gave her the opportunity to collaborate with staff and shape how the organization tells its story to the community.

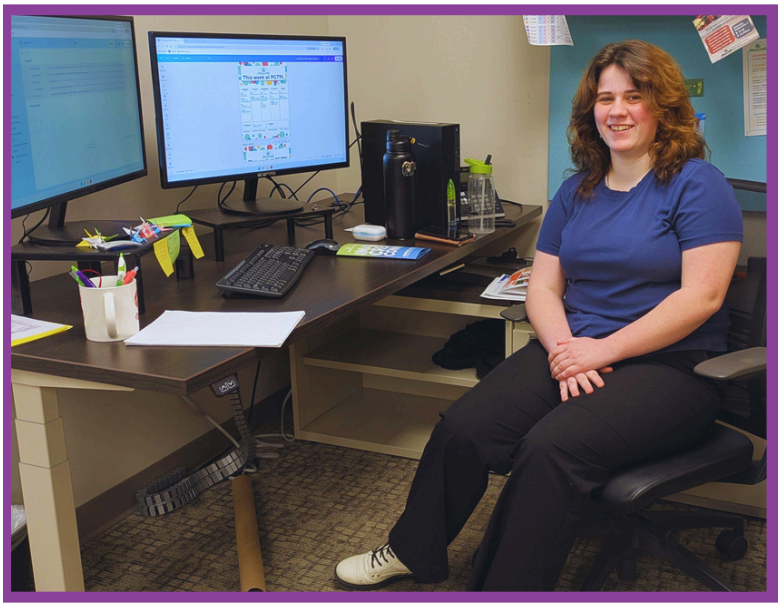
"I tried to keep it interesting...bringing the library to life, it's not just about books, it's about community," she said.

Library Director Montie and Community Liason Joanna both noted the level of ownership Sonja took on the project. From developing the vision to incorporating staff voices, her work stood out. Montie shared that the annual report was one of the most effective they've distributed to stakeholders and elected officials, highlighting both her creativity and her ability to communicate impact clearly.



Beyond technical skills, Sonja experienced significant personal growth. Initially describing herself as introverted, she found that working in a professional environment pushed her to step outside her comfort zone, collaborating with colleagues, sharing ideas, and navigating real-world feedback.

"It's not personal… it's just a couple words and a design. We can change it," she said, reflecting on how she learned to approach feedback with confidence and perspective.



Her ability to handle different personalities and work collaboratively stood out to her supervisors, especially given that she began this experience while still in high school. That growth, and the value she brought to the organization, led to a continued role with the library, even as she transitioned to college.

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For Montie, the experience also reinforced a bigger message for other employers. While bringing on a high school intern can feel like a risk, especially in roles that directly impact an organization's public image, he believes it's a risk worth taking. Beyond the immediate benefit to the student, Montie emphasized that investing in young people is ultimately an investment in the community. By giving students real opportunities to contribute, employers play a direct role in developing a more prepared, confident, and capable future workforce.

Sonja's experience highlights the powerful impact Work-Based Learning Internships can have, not just in building skills, but in helping students gain confidence, explore career paths, and make meaningful contributions to their community.

Her advice to other students considering an internship is simple:

"Just do it. Don't hesitate. You're either going to hate it or love it, but you should give yourself the chance to find out."



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HCN Contact Information

Chris Ponsler
Chris@hendrickscollegenetwork.org
317-584-6665

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