

Maine Adult Education can be a stepping stone to new careers

BY WANDA CURTIS
Correspondent

One opportunity for Maine residents to increase job skills is through Maine Adult Education. State Adult Education Director Megan Dichter said Maine Adult Ed is a public education and career pathways system which prepares adults for both post-secondary education and/or employment.

“Adult education works with students to create individualized learning pathways that look at each student’s goals and current skills including academic, digital literacy, English language acquisition, cultural and workplace competencies,” said Dichter. “These individualized programs result in targeted, supported educational opportunities, and/or job training. Adult education is a great place to start if interested in connecting to one of many high-demand occupations in Maine like healthcare, clean energy, broadband expansion, aquaculture, or commercial driver’s licenses

(CDL). Adult education programs also offer opportunities for pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeships for electricians, retail, and construction.”

In addition to helping adults transition to new careers, Dichter said adult education can help students learn new skills to increase their productivity in their current position. She added that their programs offer stand alone office skills, technology, and healthcare credentials that increase an employee’s value.

Courses Offered in All 16 Counties

Maine Adult Education courses are offered throughout the state. Programs are organized into nine regional hubs covering all 16 counties, said Dichter. A complete listing of all education providers in Maine can be accessed at <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/adulted/providers>.

In regards to course schedules, Dichter said programs operate



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on different models and calendars.

Some follow a traditional semester schedule and others offer 8-12 week courses. There’s a lot of flexibility when it comes to finding courses which align with students’ schedules, she said.

According to Dichter, the cost of each program varies. The high school completion course and English language acquisition courses are free. Some workforce trainings are associated with a cost she said. However, many participants are eligible for tuition waivers from various workforce development partners like the Maine Department of Labor.

“Adult education programs work with participants to mitigate barriers,” said Dichter. “Some programs are considered ‘earn while you learn’ programs and provide participants with a wage or stipend as the participant works towards their occupational certification.”

CNA Training

Director of Augusta Adult and Community Education Kayla Sikora said one example of the “earn while you learn” programs offered at their campus is the certified nursing assistant (CNA) program. She said they’re partnering with the Maine Veterans’ Homes-Augusta to offer that program.

“The purpose of the partnership is to increase and strengthen certified nursing assistant training in the Augusta area and prepare participants for employment within the healthcare industry within the state,” said Sikora. “The first cohort of certified nursing assistants who participated in the partnership graduated on February 10, 2023.”

Behavioral Health Profession Certification

Another healthcare-related course offered through Au-



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continued on page 33

continued from page 32

gusta Adult and Community Education is an online Behavioral Health Profession (BHP) Certification which prepares individuals to work with children, in the community and in homes, who have intellectual disabilities, autism, and mental health disorders. Children's behavioral health services are vital to children experiencing those issues and there's a great need for the services in Maine, Sikora said.

"As an integral part of the child's treatment team, a Certified Behavioral Health Professional (BHP) has the opportunity to make an immediate impact, while helping a child grow and develop their full potential," she said. "The BHP helps with coping skills and

life skills in both the community and home setting."

Augusta Adult and Community Education is partnering with Woodford Family Services to offer BHP training. It consists of twelve self-paced online modules, two 4-hour live sessions for OSHA blood-borne pathogen training, CPR, and first aid. Pre-requisites include a high school diploma or equivalency and students must be 18 years or older at the time of completion. Students are also administered a CASAS reading and comprehension assessment to determine if they are ready to enter the BHP program. If they don't achieve the necessary reading score, Augusta Adult and Community Education will provide tutoring to bring students to the appropriate read-



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ing level. All students must pass a background check after completing the training.

"This is the only training provider designated through DHHS to offer the certification in Maine," said Sikora. "Please call our office at (207) 626-2470 or email us at adulced@augustaschools.org for more information."

A list of all Augusta courses can be accessed at <https://augusta.maineadulted.org/classes/>. A brochure is also mailed out to Augusta residents twice a year. Classes are advertised on Facebook and Instagram pages too.

adult ed programs focus on improving reading, writing and math skills. They also offer the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET), which she said is an alternative pathway for adults to earn a high school equivalency diploma. A full-time adult education instructor works at Kennebec Valley Correctional Facility to provide inmates with learning opportunities such as HiSET, high school diploma training, and digital literacy.

"Adult education programs can serve as a stepping stone to a new career by offering skill development, certification opportunities, and job placement services," said Sikora. "These programs cater to a wide range of learners, providing the education and training needed for career transitions. Additionally, they offer career counseling and networking opportunities to help individuals identify and pursue their desired career paths."



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High School Equivalency Test

For individuals with limited education, Sikora said many

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