

Libraries accelerate workforce programs

By Teri Vance for the *Nevada Appeal*

Deciding what to do with the rest of your life can be daunting. Walking into a library isn't.

That's the premise behind a new initiative, "Libraries Equal Education," where Nevada libraries are harnessing resources to help people match with suitable career paths.

"Libraries are accessible to everyone," said Tammy Westergard, assistant administrator of the Nevada State Library, Archives and Public Records. "We're a force multiplier in the learning journey. A library is a community knowledge place. If you're looking for information, the first institution you'll go to is the library."

As part of the program, Workforce Connections — Southern Nevada's local workforce development board — partnered with eight libraries to host One-Stop Career Centers in the libraries.

"Embedding access to the One-Stop Delivery System in the public libraries helps us bring employment and training services closer to where businesses are located and where job seekers live," said Jaime Cruz, Workforce Connections executive director.

Job seekers can research in-demand jobs through the Nevada Career Explorer database, which shares information between the library and workforce centers.



"By aligning all parties with the same information source, that helps librarians and patrons understand the broad industry mix of the regional and statewide economy," Westergard said. "Librarians can talk knowledgeably about the skills, assessments, certifications and education required to launch a career along various occupations and pathways."

The libraries are then connected to learning institutions to help job seekers take the next step in pursuing a career.

The program was partly funded through the 2017 Legislature. The Nevada Library Association will be asking this year's legislators for a permanent \$1.5 million line item to keep collections relevant and vital programs operating.

The Nevada State Library is partnering with the College of Southern Nevada to create a pilot program where patrons can virtually test out a career before investing the money in an education.

"Sometimes it's hard to see yourself in this new economy," Westergard said. "We have a hard time seeing the day-to-day tasks of a 21st century STEM job — which understandably can seem rather abstract. The idea is to give people the opportunity to explore the job in a 3D environment. We live in 3D; being able to see how things work is very helpful in considering options. Think of it as being able to take a very immersive virtual field trip."

Working with virtual and augmented reality content publishers like Lifelique and with subject matter experts like the leaders from XR Libraries, the program is developing content to allow patrons to spend a virtual day in the life of a dialysis technician — over the course of a few minutes. Immersive, 3D experiences are being created to augment textbook learning in training future technicians.

"It's the first pilot program of its kind in America," said Mark Andersen, Lifelique's co-founder and president. "Nevada is leading the way on this."

The implications could be life changing.



For instance, a person making minimum wage could walk into a library and experience the work of a dialysis technician through virtual reality. If the person were interested, a librarian could connect him or her to the college to enroll in a 15-week course.

Upon completion, the person would be certified to work as a technician, making up to \$22 an hour.

“That’s a career,” Westergard said. “We’re no longer talking about a better job, we’re talking about a career. And it’s just the beginning.”

For a list of all One-Stop Career Center locations and free services, visit www.nv.headed2.com.