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In Palm Bay, former foster children make the cut

City teams with nonprofit to hire young adults to mow grass

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Palm Bay has created a first-of-its-kind partnership with a local nonprofit to hire former foster children for mowing -- a deal that will allow them to live rent-free in homes the city took over in foreclosures.

Palm Bay will work with Connected by 25 Brevard to fill four groundskeeper positions created when the city decided recently to stop using contractors and have its staff cut grass on rights of way and for code enforcement orders.

Connected by 25 Brevard is a 3-year-old agency that assists young adults who "age out" of the state's foster care system.

"I was thrilled with the prospect of jobs, but the housing and transportation was above and beyond," said Julia Irvin, Connected by 25 executive director.

Also as part of the partnership, Connected by 25 will buy a surplus city vehicle for the new employees to use.

The entry-level, part-time jobs' pay starts at \$10.13 per hour. Those hired must have driver licenses, pass drug tests and not have criminal convictions involving theft.

Utilities would be taken out of their pay, and the employees would be responsible for upkeep at the property where they live.

Irvin said many of her clients work for minimum wage, which is \$7.25 per hour. Some live in subsidized housing, but still pay some rent.

The partnership developed from a conversation City Manager Lee Feldman had with David Brock, a Connected by 25 board member and president of Community Credit Union.

"I think we are making a substantial impact on their program," Feldman said.

Connected by 25 Brevard works with about 70 adults between the ages of 18 and 23 who have become too old for foster care, but still need support in finding jobs and housing and making good financial decisions.

The nonprofit helps another 90 teens ages 13 to 17 prepare for life after foster care.

"It's just really hard to be 18 and not have any resources and any guidance," Irvin said. "In some ways, we're just trying to make up for the deficits life has given them through no fault of their own."

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