

# Petersburg

## Student Development Academy – Job Shadowing Program

# Young people learn what it takes to work for a city

**W**ITH THE GOAL of diversifying educational opportunities for Petersburg youth, especially during the summer when school is not in session, the Petersburg Student Development Academy – Job Shadowing Program welcomed its first class of students in the summer of 2018.

*“I received my start in local government as a teenager, this prompted me to pursue a career path toward becoming a City Manager. I believe it’s important to ignite that spark in young people.”*

– Petersburg City Manager, Aretha R. Ferrell-Benavides

The program is a product of the CAPUP Grant with Petersburg Office of Children’s Services. The CAPUP Grant provides employment opportunities for children within the City.

The Job Shadowing Program is open to Petersburg students between the ages of fifteen and nineteen. Students who advance past the application portion are required to complete an interview process prior to acceptance into the program. During its inaugural year, more than one hundred students applied, and twenty-five Petersburg High School students were chosen to participate.

Throughout the summer months of June – August, each student partnered with a city leader across various departments to learn first-

hand what goes into operating a city. Students were involved with all aspects of local government including attending planning meetings, assisting in major projects, and gaining real-time experience in the day-to-day operations of their community.

“As we continue to rebuild and fortify the foundation that is Petersburg, Virginia, we are concentrating on developing our youth,” said Petersburg Mayor, Samuel Parham. “The workforce landscape is continuously evolving, and Petersburg is dedicated to equipping our students with the meticulous training to stand out.”

### Gearing up for success

The 2018 Job Shadowing Program students benefitted from a summer filled with advancement opportunities and fresh experiences. During the first week of the program, participants completed a string of professional and social development courses including training in resume development, office etiquette, the art of conversation, proper social cues, and appropriate use of mobile devices in the workplace. Students were also enrolled in the city’s Magic Card program for the summer, giving them access to reliable transportation via free rides on Petersburg Area Transit as well as access to wellness offerings through membership in the Petersburg YMCA.



Program participants returned to partner with City leaders during National Night Out in October 2018.

*“With our students, it’s imperative that we provide a well-rounded experience for them hitting all bases of workforce preparation and also personal development.”*

– Petersburg Deputy City Manager for Community Affairs, Darnetta Tyus

This initial welcome week culminated in a trip to Maryland where students visited the A Wider Circle organization for a holistic, hands-on approach to workforce development programming. While with A Wider Circle, students went

through a full day of instruction on proper workplace dress styles through lectures and collaboration with personal shoppers. Students walked away from A Wider Circle with new business professional and business casual clothing to use during their summer jobs with the City of Petersburg.

“This opportunity was great!” affirmed Treyvion Hall, a 2018 participant. “Not only did we learn about different styles, but we also learned our unique fit for clothes. Every morning when I walked into work, they said ‘You’re looking sharp!’”

## On the job, around the links and in the park

After the precursory week of professional development, the students were introduced to the city’s leadership team during its monthly staff meeting. The city leaders were impressed by the students’ clever introductions and determined energy that demonstrated they were eager to begin work for the summer. Their assignments varied, but the students reported success in their endeavors. Some examples:

- Treyvion Hall, a dual-enrolled senior at both Petersburg High School and Richard Bland College, learned about the Job Shadowing opportunity through another program he previously participated in with the City. During the summer of 2018 he worked with the Petersburg Parks and Leisure Department where he enjoyed learning about the inner workings of local government. “I attended lots of planning sessions, worked the front desk at the recreation office, and helped with site management,” Treyvion said.
- Joshua Taylor, a Petersburg High School Junior, enjoyed working with the Petersburg Public Library during his time in the Job Shadowing program. Joshua worked at each of the library’s desks, attended strategy meetings, and assisted with library education programs. “My parents and I thought it was a great experience,” he reported. “I would definitely recommend this program to other students.”

**Editor’s Note:** *Treyvion and Joshua are still currently employed with Petersburg Parks and Leisure Department and Petersburg Public Library, respectively.*



Job Shadowing participant consults with personal shoppers at A Wider Circle.



Program participant with deputy city manager Darnetta Tyus, Petersburg commissioner of revenue Brittanny Flowers, councilmember W. Howard Myers and city manager Aretha R. Ferrell-Benavides.

However, it wasn’t all strictly work. In the spirit of opening doors to different experiences, students spent a day at Petersburg’s Dogwood Trace Golf Course (ranked #10 in Golf Advisor’s Top 25 Virginia golf courses for 2018). Dogwood Trace staff taught the students the ins and outs of the world of golf.

Additionally, in partnership with the Virginia State University – Educational Talent Search - TRIO program, students spent one week on Virginia State University’s campus taking part in professional growth and self-awareness sessions with University students and administrators. This special week concluded with an all-expense paid, trip to Florida to tour colleges and to visit Disney World.

While at Disney, students were assigned to small groups led by Disney World staff who provided an exclusive overview of the park’s employment process and business operations. Students were also engaged in backstage operations and learned how STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) principles are incorporated throughout the park. Students were impressed to learn how the various operations of the park – a veritable “city within a city” – work together to bring smiles to visitors each day.

## 2019 Program

“We’ve seen great success in the one year we’ve offered the Job Shadowing Program. We’re looking forward to this year’s applicants.” — Jacqueline Zemmitt, Petersburg Office of Children’s Services Program Manager

Tami Yerby, Director of the Job Shadowing Program, looks forward to welcoming back the 2018 participants in 2019 as job applicants and introducing new students to the program.

“The goal of the Student Development Academy - Job Shadowing Program is to create new avenues for professional advancement specifically tailored for our Petersburg students,” says Yerby. “The ultimate goal is to kindle an interest in our youth toward local government careers.”

Applications for teen summer employment in Petersburg and specifically for the 2019 Student Development Academy are available now. Applications can be picked up at Petersburg High School, Petersburg Social Services, and Petersburg Parks and Leisure Office.

To learn more about the Student Development Academy – Job Shadowing Program, call 804-324-4014. 

**About the author:** *Folakemi O. Osoba is the City of Petersburg Public Information Officer.*