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Forest company program gives youths their first crack at a job

STUDENTS | Initiative by Weyerhaeuser creates 114 positions in non-profit organizations this summer

BY GILLIAN SHAW
VANCOUVER SUN

Weyerhaeuser has created 114 jobs this summer for British Columbia students and they're not about cutting trees, planting, working in a mill or, in fact, doing anything that's vaguely akin to the operations of the forestry giant.

Instead, the students have been toiling away at non-profit organizations, doing everything from teaching kids in an engineering and science camp in Vancouver to raising babies — animal ones that is — at Langley's Critter Care Wildlife Society.

The criteria for Weyerhaeuser's Jobs for Youth program: They must be jobs in the communities where the company operates and for the students, it must be a first paying job.

Michelle Lloyd has an impressive résumé of volunteer and community work, but it was thanks to a Weyerhaeuser grant to Vancouver's Minerva Foundation that she was able to get her first paying job.

Based in Minerva's offices in downtown Vancouver, Lloyd has learned first hand not only the workings of a



GLENN BAGLO/VANCOUVER SUN

Michelle Lloyd is working at The Minerva Foundation as part of a Weyerhaeuser initiative that created 114 summer jobs for British Columbia students.

busy non-profit organization but has had the added bonus of being mentored by some of Vancouver's most successful women. The Minerva Foundation for BC Women was launched in 1999 to help

women through various projects, from its Helping Women Work Initiative aimed at getting women back in the workforce to its leadership program for young women.

Lloyd got her summer job

after attending a leadership weekend for Grade 11 students at the University of B.C. in June.

"I am so grateful I was able to attend the leadership conference, that kind of got me

through the door into this job," she said. "It is hard to get a first job these days with all the competition out there."

Lloyd, who plans to study science at the University of B.C. with the goal of becoming

a psychiatrist, is a tireless volunteer, tutoring learning disabled children, volunteering with a seniors' centre, helping youths who are new

First jobs are 'a rite of passage' with real drama

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immigrants to Canada and volunteering for the band festival at her school where she played in three bands last year.

This summer's six weeks of work have boosted her office and computer skills and Minerva's executive director Denise Coutts said the teen was given responsibility to carry out a number of projects and tasks over the summer.

"She has been a tremendous help," said Coutts. "Students these days have amazing computer skills and she has done a lot to catch us up.

"The Minerva Foundation is all about leadership so we tried to put her in a position where she had lots of responsibility.

"She would be given a project and she wasn't expected to report back all the time, she would just carry it out on her own."

Weyerhaeuser's Jobs for Youth had its start in British Columbia in the '90s and it has grown to a nation-wide program, with a budget this year of about \$300,000 accounting for 221 summer positions.

"We have a fairly extensive donations program at Weyerhaeuser and most of our donations are focused on improving the lives of people where we have operations," said Lawrence Pillon, director, government and public affairs at Weyerhaeuser.

This program, which represents about 10 per cent of the company's annual giving in Canada, came about when employment counsellors at the Y wanted the company to place students in jobs over the summer.

Weyerhaeuser didn't have the jobs that were needed so it decided to fund non-profit organizations to create them.

"It could be a First Nations group, an animal shelter, a recreation program, an environmental program — it is a special way for us to make a connection with the local community," said Pillon.

"The non-profits benefit, it helps with the work they are doing and it is a way of connecting with young people."

Since the program went national in 2002, the company has handed out more than \$1 million, to 539 organizations, accounting for 720 first jobs.

Being part of young people's first foray into the world of paid work is important to the company, said Pillon and while many, like Lloyd, are headed to careers unrelated to forestry, he said others could end up back at the company some day.

"The first job is a rite of passage, like your first car and it has a drama to itself," he said. "It is just one of those places where you can make a connection with the community and with a young person, I think, in a pretty special way."
