

APPRENTICE STORY

SAVANNA

GRAND JUNCTION FIRE DEPT

BUSINESS
OPERATIONS



COMMUNITY
OUTREACH

“IT’S SUPER HANDS-ON AND VISUAL. I REALIZED I LEARN BEST BY DOING AND REFLECTING. AND I’M CAPABLE OF A LOT MORE THAN I THOUGHT I WAS.”



Savanna loves learning. She loves meeting new people. And she loves the puzzle of figuring things out. These are key ingredients for being a successful apprentice—and are what make Savanna so good in her role as a CareerWise modern youth apprentice. Where school lacks instruction in the softer skills necessary for career success, such as communication and responsibility, her apprenticeship fills the gaps. Now, Savanna looks forward to college and is weighing her many career options.

A UNIQUE WAY OF LEARNING

Savanna graduated from Palisade High School in May 2018. A straight-A student, Savanna was the person her peers often liked to copy. When she did struggle, she “rose back up” and always did her best to make things right.

A self-professed perfectionist and chronic planner, Savanna admits to over-thinking things. That’s why she felt a bit uneasy about the idea of apprenticeship at the Grand Junction Fire Department (GJFD), where she knew things would be learn-as-you-go and a bit past-paced, often with little time to think through the details.

“It’s a unique way of learning. I didn’t think that would work for me,” she said. But Savanna adapted her ways when GJFD hired her as a community outreach specialist. “It ended up being very constructive to learn to be more flexible. Working in fire services gets you to be comfortable with uncomfotability.”

Savanna had also been anxious about joining the workforce without having any prior experience—not even in the fast-food or retail industry. “I was worried I would mess up. It’s not just a food order, it’s somebody’s safety.” She overcame her fears by simply embedding herself in the work culture and figuring things out with the help of friendly coworkers.

“They all support me and want the best for me. They are my comrades.”

TAPPING INTO INNATE SKILLS

At GJFD, Savanna serves as a bridge between the fire department and the community, educating community members about fire safety. With tasks ranging from giving school presentations and car seat installation instructions, to leading marketing campaigns and using design software tools, Savanna is expanding her skillset exponentially. She is discovering a new learning style and untapping creativity she didn't realize she had.

"It's super hands-on and visual. I realized I learn best by doing and reflecting. And I'm capable of a lot more than I thought I was," she said.

She is also learning how to speak more easily with people from diverse areas of the community—from fire chiefs and fire witnesses, to school children and city officials. Her take-away from these experiences is that no matter one's position in life, there are similarities that bring people together. "Everybody is still a person, even those who have higher authority."

With that greater ease of speaking comes greater comfort in voicing her opinions, even when they differ from others'. "I can speak my mind better than I thought. I've developed this skill through apprenticeship," she said.

Savanna has discovered her preference for the work environment over school, where she constantly felt confined to the set structures of a rubric with little opportunity to grow. "I like feeling more responsible, being able to prioritize tasks my own way and not being micromanaged."

BOUNDLESS OPTIONS: A GOOD PROBLEM TO HAVE

Savanna will soon enter college—Colorado Mesa University—to study business administration. When she's not in class, she will go to her apprenticeship at GJFD. Her schedule will not be difficult to manage, she said, as her experience has taught her perseverance and patience.

Apprenticeship is already opening Savanna's eyes to the many potential paths her career could take. She enjoys the uniqueness of working in fire services, and also envisions herself working for a nonprofit, potentially combining the two into a single job. For example, she sees community outreach gaps in other Grand Junction departments and is playing with the idea of trying to serve that need.

Regardless, Savanna wants to support a bigger picture in her work while playing an essential role. "It would definitely be cool to be a leader someday," she said.

Equipped with life skills such as the ability to adapt and an aspiration to lead, Savanna feels that her apprenticeship experience is preparing her well for whatever the future holds.

"There are lots of possibilities. It's a good problem to have."

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