

SNAPS OPENS OFFICE IN HIGH RIVER



A new division was launched early this year by Foothills SNAPS that focuses on giving everyone a chance to work, no matter what their barriers might be in life, according to The High River Times.

The office was opened in January and is known as H.I.R.E., Having Inclusive Rewarding Employment.

“Maybe 15 or 20 years ago, people who had **special needs weren't necessarily having the same opportunities for employment** and it's different now,” said Orvella Small, executive director of Foothills SNAPS. “There's an expectation that everyone has an opportunity to work. So that's where we're coming from is everybody should have that opportunity.”

One-on-one training and workshops are run by three full-time employees for residents of Foothills who face barriers to finding a job. Those barriers include a mental or physical disability, diabetes, depression, epilepsy, sleep disorders or anything else that would cause difficulty finding work.

The new H.I.R.E. program was granted an 18-month contract following funding from the Opportunities Fund and financial help from Foothills SNAPS. It is expected that the contract will be extended after the first one expires.

There are two, full-day workshops held following an orientation program for those who need help finding work. The workshops help job seekers with **personal development, interviews, resume tips and planning for a career**. Meetings with staff members can be held one-on-one so clients can work on added skills and other items. Fridays are reserved for casual meetings.

The program is designed to help job seekers establish goals in relation to their personal barrier so they do not let it prevent them from gaining employment. Support from the staff includes writing strong cover letters, managing stress and teaching problem solving skills.

“It's a really interesting program because people may have a mindset: this is what I've always done and this is what I can do,” explained Alise Kuipers of the H.I.R.E. program. “By going through this process, it opens up their eyes to other possibilities they'd be really good at.”

The program also meets with local businesses to discuss what it is like to hire employees with a disability or a barrier and how the employers can show support for those people.

“We're meeting with employers all the time just to talk about how it's no different hiring someone with a **barrier or disability**. It really isn't,” Kuipers said. “It's the exact same process and we talk to them about any accommodations that may be needed and probably alleviate their fears over that. Sometimes they can anticipate a high cost to that and there really isn't.”

When the candidate finds employment, the program offers short-term support for the employer and the employee at the workplace.