

Group matches kids with careers

BY AMANDA MILLARD Gazette Staff Reporter

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Futures for Kids seeks to help students graduate by connecting them with careers, but it needs help from local businesses to be successful.

"It's all about keeping kids in school," employer relations manager Diane Blais said to the Rotary Club of Gastonia last week. "That's the bottom line." Futures for Kids is a nonprofit organization that shows students what careers they might be suited for based on their interests, said Blais, who works out of Raleigh. It uses the Internet to connect students with businesses.

Gaston County Schools will begin implementing the program in middle and high schools this fall, said Wanda Campbell, business partnerships director. Educators will begin training this spring.

Local businesses can get involved by volunteering as a career coach, Blais said. Students post questions about a career on a discussion board. Career coaches would answer their questions by posting responses. Responding to questions should take about 15 minutes a week.

"We need career coaches from every sector," Blais said. Businesses would also be able to send information to students and control who they send to by location, demographics, interests or aptitudes, Blais said.

"We are a way for your business community to support local kids while building your local work force," Blais said.

"For anyone who is looking to hire, utilizing Futures for Kids is better than posting an ad or going to a career fair because you can target and filter by communicating with kids who have an aptitude and interest in the careers you are trying to fill." Those attending said they thought reaching students by showing them what they could be in the future would be beneficial.

"I think it's an interesting idea," said Gastonia attorney Locke Bell. "The key is to let the students know that there are interesting jobs out there if they do graduate." Others agreed that the organization could be useful in Gaston County.

"Anything we can do to stimulate interest in future education is a great thing," said County Commissioner Pearl Burris Floyd. "I think it's important. We often think of role models as being somewhere else. But it starts here." You can reach Amanda Millard at (704) 869-1839.