

Career Exploration

By Dr. Al Roberts

How many children have been asked the question, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" Some want to fight fires, some want to help people overcome diseases and disabilities, and some want to teach. Some have aspirations to play professional sports or to travel in outer space. Although a few may follow one career path without deviation, many change their minds frequently.

Visiting places of employment provides a unique educational experience that encourages young people to think about their vocational goals and the preparation that may be required to pursue opportunities.

Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work is a nationwide program that encourages parents and other mentors to help children make connections between school learning and workplace activities. This annual observance falls on the fourth Thursday of April, which will be April 27 this year.

The Virginia Education Wizard (available online at vawizard.org) is another resource that can open the door to a wide range of career exploration possibilities. Tools available on the website enable young people and others to assess their skills, interests, and values and see how they align with a variety of potential paths. The site also offers information about the education and training requirements of different careers. One interesting area enables visitors to answer questions about envisioned lifestyles to discover the annual salaries required to sustain different ways of living.

Summer camp programs also provide school-aged children opportunities to supplement classroom learning with hands-on activities. Local schools, along with youth development, faith-based, and mentoring organizations, offer programs across a broad spectrum of options that include science, nature, academics, and fitness. Here at Southside Virginia Community College, we offer summer camps to provide young people participatory experiences that enable them to explore cutting edge topics and technologies, such as 3D printing and robotics.

For today's young people, it's never too early to explore ideas about potential future careers, but it's also never too late. The question, "What do you want to do?" doesn't disappear at childhood's end.

Career planning is an activity for everyone. According to a 2015 survey conducted the Bureau of Labor Statistics, people who were born between 1957 and 1964 held an average of 11.7 jobs between the ages of 18 and 48. While some changes may have represented steps along a single pathway, many involved switching careers entirely. Veterans returning to civilian life, unemployed and underemployed workers, and people with evolving interests and needs were all among those who made significant changes in career trajectories.

If you have questions about exploring career options, for yourself or for a child, contact SVCC at 434-949-1000. Our team of academic and workforce advisors can help you discover an exciting path to the future.

Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at al.roberts@southside.edu.