



Goodwill

Southwest Florida



Pathways to Work - High School High Tech Success Story

Patrick Grant

Student with disabilities finds a niche caring for Caloosa Humane Society animals

An emaciated caramel-colored dog is brought to the lobby of the Caloosa Humane Society Shelter, her ribs protruding and her appetite voracious. All eyes are on the rescue dog as she laps up the dish of food prepared to help fill out her large frame.

Outside, an energetic bulldog named “Chubbs” tests the strength of his leash as Kennel Technician Patrick Grant soothes the rescue pup, whose new fit-and-trim figure no longer matches his name.

Executive Director Jennifer Johnson rushes to beat the clock and deliver 10 strays to a Naples adoption center before they close. These are snapshots of a day in the life of animal shelter employees.

The LaBelle “no kill” shelter cares for hundreds of dogs and cats annually and relies on many volunteers to perform some of the less appealing shelter jobs, such as cleaning the kennels and litter boxes. That doesn’t bother Grant, who began volunteering at the shelter as part of the Able Trust Florida High School High Tech Program, which is offered at several high schools, including LaBelle High School.

Administered by Goodwill Industries of Southwest Florida, the program helps students with disabilities or disadvantages establish career goals.

Grant had an allergic reaction to plastic ear tubes, which caused deafness for two years and delayed his speech development.

The shelter seemed like a good fit for the teen, who has owned and cared for dogs, cats, birds, fish and hamsters as pets. After graduation, Grant tried working a job as a retail stocker and janitor, but he changed course and applied to work at the shelter because he likes “hanging with the animals.”

“He’s a model employee,” says Shelter Manager Ida Erwin. “I don’t know of many kids who don’t like animals, but it has to be the right fit. It’s nice to show the students what a job can be and to give them something constructive to do in the community.”

Several students enrolled in the program have chosen the shelter, which allows them to volunteer before and after school and during the summer months.

“Education is huge and if we can give these young adults a step up in life to find their passion, we will,” Johnson said.



Jennifer Johnson and Patrick Grant