

>> Hello. This is Janet Michael.

In addition to hosting the Valley Today,
each weekday at noon on The River 95.3,

I also produce podcasts,

and I'm excited to introduce you to

a new podcast series in partnership with Lord Fairfax Community College.

Having provided higher education and career training for the past half-century,

LFCC is tightly interwoven into the fabric

of the Northern Shenandoah Valley in Piedmont regions.

Join me every week for conversations with current and former students to hear
their funny and inspiring stories as we learn about their journey to higher education,
the role that LFCC has played,

where they are now, and where they plan to go.

We'll also talk to current and former professors about

their experiences and best memories of LFCC over the past 50 years.

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Hello, and welcome to The Valley Today I am your host,

Janet Michael. Happy Thursday.

As you are listening to the show today,

it is LFCC day here on the show,

and I am on the Zoom screen with Guy Curtis.

He is the director of marketing for

Workforce Solutions at Lord Fairfax Community College.

Guy has a newbie to the show.

We're going to try and not make her be too nervous.

Julia Bridgen is also with him.

He is their new workforce coach.

Guy, welcome and tell me about Julia.

You have a new partner in crime?

>> That's right. Thank you for having us back.

Yes, she's a wonderful addition to our team.

Of course, it takes a village for a lot of our programs to

help folks decide where they need to go next in terms of their next steps.

We felt having a workforce coach, Julia,

onboard has done an integral part of what we do in serving the community.

With her coaching role,

she's going to be a tremendous asset to our team to

help folks decide what their next steps are,

what kind of resources they have available to them, and of course,

we're going to have programs to help them succeed

in the careers locally within our region.

We're very excited to have Julia.

Welcome, Julia, to the show.

>> Julia, tell me a workforce coach sounds like a really cool title.

What exactly are you going to be doing with people?

>> I think to sum it up,

I am here to be available.

I am here to be available to talk to prospective students,

help current students, popular community partners,

just anybody who comes along and wants to learn about our courses,
perhaps some of our funding options.

Maybe some people who might need some assistance with picking a new career path.

I feel like there are so many different things that I can help with.

I was talking to someone actually earlier today and they said, "I'm really scared.

I want to start a new career but I haven't been in school for 15 years."

I just needed somebody to say, hey,

I'm really scared and can I just talk to you about that?

They're like, well, I feel better.

I'm ready to maybe go further and sign up for school now.

Lots of different things.

>> You're going to be a combination of a resource and a therapist.

I think it too in a lot of degrees.

>> Which is fine. I really love working with people.

I've been career coaching for about six years now.

I moved from the Roanoke area back in October

and lucky to pour a job at Lord Fairfax with Workforce Solutions.

I worked with one of our sister colleges in Roanoke.

I'm doing career coaching and I just love it.

I love meeting all different types of people and helping as many people as I can.

>> I would guess you're going to have a lot of the same questions,

probably with different scenarios, different backgrounds.

A lot of different people are going to have the same issues,

but they're going to have different experiences.

Like you mentioned, there's going to be people that come in and say,

look, I want to change my career,

but I don't know where to start.

There are going to be high school seniors who say,

I'm just starting my college life,

but I also need to get a job and make sure

my classes are going to fit whatever job I want to have.

You really do have to know a little bit about a lot of things.

>> Yeah, you know, when people come and

they want to start a new career or take some classes,

you have to think about other things besides just going to school

because it's really not truly just jumping in and going to school.

There are other needs that people have to have met prior to that.

That's also a conversation that I like to have with people like,

hey, do you have access to transportation?

Is this schedule going to work for you?

You have the tools that you need to be picked up for, and if they don't,

then that's when we can connect them with all of

our great partners within the community to help meet all these different needs,

to provide these wrap-around services.

Like I said, it definitely takes village to help people.

>> Guy, earlier today,

I recorded the show that will air tomorrow and it's about

an information session that

Virginia Career Works is co-hosting with Navy Federal Credit Union.

We talked about training and what kinds of skill sets that you need to have to

get a new job but then Kristi also mentioned being able to grow in that existing job.

Are you guys seeing an increase in people during this pandemic wanting to get

some of that training on the back-end so when we get back to full steam ahead,

they're able to move up in the ranks of their current job?

>> Absolutely yeah. Unlike, I guess,

different from the recession back in 2008, 2009,

many folks were displaced and looking for work opportunities and lot of them were

completely career changers who maybe did not have a degree but nowadays,

many folks today who've been impacted by

COVID-19 or have been laid off for whatever reason,

they have some degree,

they have some kind of certification,

but now just trying to find and place themselves within

a job or new career that makes the most sense for them in their transition.

A lot of them are lacking some of those specific skills,

but they have previous experiences already to help

build them up and all this will make them a strong candidate.

But a lot of cases we're still seeing the employers in our region

still looking for specific skill sets and specific credentials and certifications.

Many unemployment locally is a little bit lower than the

state average but there's a lot of jobs

that are still popping out there still going unfilled.

Some retailers coming back,

some hospitality opportunities in food business are coming back solely.

There's a lot of openings we've seen in that area.

But when it comes to longevity and long-term opportunity,

but also the most demand is, well,

health care and IT still emerging as some of

the top areas that we're seeing a need for and so on.

The major health care employer in our region,

a number of small entities around health care looking for opportunities for folks to get on board, but they still need that credential or certification that demonstrates the skills that are required to get on board.

The same for IT too.

I would say it's an emerging career industry around this new virtual pandemic environment that we're in.

Many companies need this IT support work, software development, or any kind of hardware and networking.

That thing is always a growing need.

But also the source that folks are also needing as well in addition to some of those hard skills and credentials that folks have, it's the soft skills too that folks are needing as well.

We're seeing a rebound and effort and some of the top needs right now that can help folks understand where should I sharpen my skills for my next steps?

It's going to be in the area of communication.

Verbal, written skills, customer service, being a team player, being co-operative, but also leadership skills too.

Many folks have been thrust into the leadership role.

We've seen some employers coming forward with us directly and our corporate training side to look for assistance on leadership because there's first-line supervisors being thrust into positions because they've done well in their job in the past.

But now all of a sudden their particular industry is growing larger, and so they're being thrust into these leadership roles.

We've had some opportunity to work with a couple of employees locally on

leadership.

From those individuals are out there,

they're finding ways to piece together what they've done before.

But in some cases,

they're finding a need that they still need to brush up on,

the soft skills or hard schools or some type of credential to get them to the next point.

>> Now, Julia, are you having those conversations with people too?

Say they're coming to you and saying, "Look,

I just recently got this promotion and now I'm a manager

of five or six people that used to be my friends,

and I'm struggling with how to be their manager and how to lead."

What do you do in those situations?

Do you help them find courses that do that or are you more of a cheerleader?

Though I have not had that type of situation happen yet,

but in that type of situation,

I would've definitely steer them toward more of our corporate training courses.

Since it's not really my specialty,

I would definitely refer them out to our leaders in

our corporate training department who would be able to help them better than I could.

But I would be happy to get them started and talking about some of our classes.

>> I think that's the other perk is that you have access,

even if you personally can't say, "Well,

here's what I would suggest that you do follow the step one,

step two, step three."

You've got access to,

not just all of the programs that work for solutions offer,

but all of the college programs in general.

There probably isn't going to be a scenario or a question that you either don't have the answer for or can't get the answer for them.

>> Right. I have always been a very student and perky oriented person, so if someone comes to me wanting some information or they have an issue, if I can't fold it,

I'm going to say, "Hey, I don't know the answer, I can't fix it,

but I'm going to find somebody who can just hang tight and I'll get back to you."

I never like to turn people away without some help,

without some resource, because there are

so many opportunities out there that people may not know about.

Helping people find what they need is just what I love to do.

>> I think a lot of times,

and I mentioned this on the show Tomorrow as well,

that we tend to disqualify ourselves even before we take that first step, we just don't,

we don't look into something where we could better ourselves because we feel like, that's not going to work for me or that probably isn't available.

Having somebody like Julia on staff with you as

a workforce coach is really going to help you be able to break down that barrier.

>> Absolutely. I am just trying to think

through some scenarios myself when it comes to big,

major decisions of our life and what we do.

We've always looked or reached out to someone to talk through,

what's possible, what's not possible,

who could help me in this situation.

The coach is the ideal person for that.

When it comes to helping them connect
the dots as far as how do I make this program possible,
maybe it is really possible.

I think Julia hit on the head there earlier as far as there's
so many ways that people can come across barriers
and how can she help them overcome those barriers and those resources by either
connecting them with our community partners or resources we have internally.

But it is a challenge trying to figure out,
can I even time out for this program?

Can I come one at a week or can I do a weekend training or
how am I even going to afford this transportation and childcare?

There's all these barriers that come into play.

But if you have someone to lean on to,
to talk a little bit, just to be a sounding board for ones,
but also a resource for many other community connections that we have,
they are tremendous assets.

I think it doesn't hurt to ask.

I think that's a lot of us if you're open to asking,
open to chatting too,

because we have a lot of technology and online
resources for folks just lay it out to our website,

We have an online career coach,
we have a chat feature.

There's a lot of sum of folks who may not necessarily to
talk to someone right away or may not have the time to.

But if you give us a shot, give Julia a shot,
just reach out we can help connect the dots for you.

In a lot of cases,

it is a lot more feasible than they realize initially just by talking to someone.

Let's take a quick break when we come back,

can we touch more on two of the things that you just said.

One is time, and the other is money because I know funding is always an option.

Because you guys have a lot of really great programs that people could take some of these things for little to no out-of-pocket money.

You mentioned time, but because things aren't online a little bit more;

can we talk about those in more detail in the next segment?

>> Yes, that sounds great.

>> We're going to take a quick break when we come back,

we're going to continue our conversation with Guy Curtis.

He is the Director of Marketing for

Workforce Solutions at Lord Fairfax Community College.

Joining us on the Zoom screen is Julia Bridgen,

she is one of their workforce coaches.

I am Janet Michael and you are listening to the Valley Today.

>> Got a financial decision to make or a goal to reach,

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Welcome back to the Valley Today I am your host, Janet Michael.

Happy Thursday as you are listening to the show today.

We of course, have pre-recorded our conversation on the Zoom screen, we are chatting today with Guy Curtis.

He is the Director of Marketing for Workforce Solutions at Lord Fairfax Community College.

Also on the Zoom with us is Julia Bridgen.

She is their new workforce coach.

Guy, we were talking in the first segment about all of the obstacles.

Some of them real, some of them in our minds or perceived obstacles that people have when they are starting a new career, changing their career or wanting to upgrade the career that they have and two other things that you mentioned when we were talking earlier, one of them was time.

You've got a lot of programs that don't take a lot of time.

>> Yeah, absolutely. Many of that is one of the great things we would like

to say and suggest to our students who are considering a career today, want to get into a career right away by tomorrow.

We call them fast-track programs. There's a reason for that.

It's a lot of them or in some cases as many as 20

days and there's a couple of programs that are getting up to 16 weeks.

A month or three to four months,

depending on the program area,

you can find yourself quickly into a new career.

I think one of the big perks about them as well too,

they align directly with the employment opportunities that are happening right now,

and especially some of the high-demanding areas that

employers are struggling to find a qualified workforce for.

Manufacturing, construction trades, health care, information technology,

IT, and transportation are a number of huge opportunities locally.

If you found yourself,

or you know someone in a situation where they need to get into a career quickly,

a lot of these fast-track programs can quickly get you there.

In some cases, there are a couple of nights a week, over a weekend,

and some opportunities we have with our commercial driver's license program,

it's a full-time program,

so you're an eight to five,

Monday through Friday for about 20 days.

Then you're done potentially getting your CDL in one

of the areas most high-demand credentials of our region.

CDL continues to be an ever need that we have in terms of credentials,

Healthcare IT are also others,

but the time commitment is very minimal,

and so if you're able to talk with

Julia on our team and figure out some of your barriers.

What are the things I need to connect to figure out that

I can understand whether it's one night a week?

Do I need to have childcare for that particular situation or can I

timeout from my full-time job while I make a transition into another job or career?

That's the nice thing about it.

Many active working adults to those who have other time constraints,

these fast-track programs really meet the needs of folks who want to get

into a career fast and get a degree or credential,

I should say that is

an immediate need of employers and find employment directly right away.

>> I know some of those programs and you and I have talked about this on the show before.

Some of those programs offer guaranteed interviews,

where if you're going through that program,

there's a list of companies waiting to give you

an interview the second you have received that certification or passed that final test.

>> That's right. In some cases,

we've partnered with a few industries like heavy construction,

Commercial Driver's License Program, RRT programs.

We've partnered with a few key employers to help

provide a potential pipeline of skilled individuals for their needs.

But other cases like health care, for example.

There are those folks who apply themselves.

They get the credential that they need in the skill set they're going to get

hired really quickly because employers are in high demand for these folks.

It comes down in some cases that individuals,
how they apply themselves through the interview process.

You have the skills, but now you have to have
soft skills demonstrated and implying yourself to that position.

Yes, there's a lot of opportunities,
locally with a short period of time and
the guaranteed interview does certainly help a lot in some cases.

>> Then the other key thing that I would imagine you hear a lot too is,
"Yeah, but I don't have a lot of money.

It's expensive to go back to school."

I think people lump in going back to
school with something that is much bigger than what it actually is.

In a lot of cases, especially in
your particular situation where you can specialize what you need to do.

>> That's right. Since the new year,
we came back from a short winter break being on for the college.

We came back with some new funding opportunities that the state of
Virginia is incentivizing Virginians to go after.

But there's also funding options for other folks depending on their situation,
but some of those opportunities are COVID-19 based.

In other words, if you'd been impacted
financially or your household has been impacted in some way or form.

There is some very unique funding stream,
and so in a lot of cases,

many of these fast-track programs,
there's no upfront investment in terms of cost.

In some cases they do want you to complete the program,

but otherwise there are some other funding as well too.

A quick scenario for you,

maybe you're just working in industry and you're looking to get

into a new career and you haven't been impacted by COVID,

whether it was a financial situation,

or you haven't had any reduction in hours of your job,

or you haven't lost your job or anything,

there's still incentive for folks to go after some of

these fast-track high demand credentials and we have an additional program called FANTIC.

I won't get into all the acronyms because we have a lot of things to describe,

but if you're at

the 400 percent poverty rate and make less than that with your financial gross income,

then you have a chance to have the class paid fully for one of these fast-track programs.

Back in the late part of last year,

we had a couple of other funding streams that came through

and they were just so many to describe.

Locally also too, if you're a Warren County resident,

we do have a new scholarship that we also are

promoting too if you have been impacted by COVID-19.

Long story short, many of these programs,

if you're eligible, you're a Virginia resident there's a couple

of factors to consider in terms of household income.

You could get your class entirely paid for,

if not a certain percentage, most of it covered.

I think what it comes down to is having

a conversation with our staff and let us navigate these options with you.

One of the biggest barriers is financial investment,

many folks are in some cases

nowadays living paycheck to paycheck because of the situation they may have

been forced to be put in based on

their job loss or household income, whatever it might be.

Let us help you navigate those options for you,

I think there's probably

five or six new funding streams as well as local scholarships like

the Warren County scholarship that's out there that's available to

local residents that aren't out there,

so we have to figure out, where do you live,

what financial information do you have based on your past history,

we want to exhaust those.

Julia on our team,

she's a great resource to have that conversation with as

you're exploring programs or thinking about different careers.

How am I going to pay with this course?

How am I going to pay for this class?

She would be a great resource to talk to,

to navigate this funding options with.

>> Julia , I would imagine sometimes that might

even be the first question that you are asked,

is they're not even sure what they want to do

or what kind of a career path they are looking at.

They're just going on the assumption that no

matter what that choice is, they can't afford it,

so you sometimes have to start there with the funding,
then figure out which path to take.

>> Yeah. Sometimes it's funny though,
most of the people that I talk to, they're like, hey,
I really want to do X class,
but how do I pay for it?

What opportunities do you guys have?

Then of course sometimes people are like, hey,

I really wanted to come back to school,

I have no idea what I want to do,

but I know that I wanted to do something different, but you know what?

I definitely know that I can't pay for it out of pocket.

Do I need to fill out the FAFSA, that's where we have to be like, no,

our funding opportunities are completely separate from Pilgrim, from other federal
grant.

We have our own little buckets of money and let me
talk to you about all of them because we have so many of them.

Most of the time we can find some funding for multiple people.

>> I will tell you as the parent of a college graduate,
if you don't have to go through the FAFSA program don't do it,
it is a nightmare.

>> That's why I tell people,
if I could have had free money when I went to college,
I would have taken it so fast.

These short-term quick credential and these high demand industries,
they're going to get people working quickly,

whereas the traditional four year or two year degree's they are just not for
everybody.

These credentials are great because they can get you into the field very quickly.

When I graduated with my bachelor's degree,

it took me almost two years to find

a job even remotely related to my field and these people are getting jobs immediately.

>> I would think too that sometimes they'll come to you and maybe thinking they need

a career change because they don't realize

what options there are to move up in their existing career.

You can say, well, you know, if you do this now if you've got this credential,

you could probably move up,

so you really are educating on all sides of the spectrum.

>> Yes, definitely.

Also for people who either want to move up or move a different direction,

maybe in their career field or for people who are like,

I have no idea what I want to do,

we have some great assessment tool that we can provide for them online,

then I can help walk them through them and explain what they'd need, and say,

hey okay, based on your answer,

you may be a great fit for the health care field,

but let's narrow that down.

Do you want to work hands-on with people or do you want to work more hands off?

Let's talk about which of the programs maybe better suited for you,

or hey, maybe you should stack these credentials.

You want to be a nursing assistant?

Great. How about also being a medication aide as well?

The classes are quick and you'll be able to earn two state licenses out of that.

>> She's going to be a huge asset Guy.

You told me in the beginning that while she is new to the program, a work force coach isn't new to the overall part of Workforce Solutions though.

>> Right. We've had coaches in the past

and we have our current coach who moved to a different role within

the department so we're happy to hire on Julia

with her past experience from her previous community college within Virginia.

She comes with a ton of experience in the healthcare industry.

She's quickly learning all the new opportunities within our region as well,

manufacturing IT and lot of these industries

that are out there that have high-paying jobs.

I like what she said there earlier as far

as depending on where that student is, and where they are,

whether they're coming straight out of high school or if they're

coming from a different industry,

you can stack credentials to get you to the next point.

I think you alluded to this a little bit earlier to Janet.

Lot of these employers locally,

once you get on board with them,

after the first year,

will provide continue education,

professional development to continue to grow.

Like many folks who are thinking about

the whole slashing student debt mindset and folks who are

thinking about their son or daughter who might be going off to college next year.

Maybe they don't want to rack up the debt right

away and they're uncertain about their future,

there's a lot of local opportunity within our region.

I think some of us tend to forget about that
but while you're working towards a degree long-term,
or certification in a certain area, get a job locally.
See if you do like that in industry in some way or form,
do I like the healthcare industry?
Maybe I'll sample it with a credential, get into it for a little bit,
then shift to a different part of the health care environment.
There's a lot of job opportunities within the healthcare environment area,
so sampling it with a credential or starting
off with little with no debt potentially with some of these classes and
programs is a great way to start and so leaning
on some of the employers as well to help them financially to see you grow.
I know many of them are our region after the first year,
they'll support you as you go through your career pathway.
They want to incentivize to keep you on board and help see you grow
so why not have the employer potentially support you as you grow as a professional?
A lot of tremendous opportunity and having a community connector like Julia in
place to
help you connect with those people has been
a huge asset to our department and helping folks navigate where they go.
Certainly across the community college,
we have a number of advisors,
we have high school career coaches that are
supporting students as they come out of those areas.
She's just another resource to connect and tap into in
terms of understanding what within our region,
within our area, what kind of resources can I utilize

as I grow as a professional and want to get into the workforce.

No matter where you are, if you're starting,

enhancing or changing your career,

she would be a tremendous resource for sure.

>> Julia, if somebody is listening and they want to connect with

you so that they can tell you they have no idea what their next step is,

how do they reach out to you?

What is the best way for them to get in touch with you?

>> Smoke signal. No, I'm just kidding.

There are tons of different ways to reach out to me.

I am all in the mindset of meeting people where they're

at so I have put up a way where people can call me,

they can text me, they can email me,

we can set up a video chat.

A great way is to go onto our website and put

in a request for more information

and say that you would like to speak to someone about advising,

then I get those emails and reach out,

but someone can call me as well.

>> Fantastic. Guy, I will put the link to all of that on the show notes page.

Thank you both for coming to hang out with me on

the Zoom for a little bit today. I appreciate it.

>> Absolutely. Thank you for having us.

As far as I do have the link for that so I want to mention on the air too,

ifccworkforce.com/coach is a great place to link up and connect with Julia.

She's right, you could fill out some of our forms there to get in

contact with her directly or anybody on our team but

Ifccworkforce.com/coach is a great place to get her exact information and connect with her that way and whatever your preference might be. Whether it's on any of our campuses, or centers, or virtually online, or over the phone, wherever someone prefers, we can connect them with Julia.

Thank you for having us Janet.

>> You can check all of the boxes.

>> That's right.

>> Well, we are going to wrap up our conversation today.

We have been chatting with Guy Curtis.

He is the Director of Marketing for

Workforce Solutions at Lord Fairfax Community College.

Joining him on the Zoom has been Julia Bridge and she is their workforce coach.

Again, ifccworkforce.com/coach,

I'll put the link in the show notes page. I will be back tomorrow.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm having a conversation with

Christy Powers from Navy Federal Credit Union and Bonnie Zang Pino.

She is with the Virginia career works.

We're going to talk about an information session that Navy Federal

is hosting next week for people who

might be interested in one of

the 300 call center jobs they're going to be hiring for in the next couple of weeks.

Meet me back here tomorrow,

just a few minutes afternoon.

I will have all of those details ready to go for you.