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What keeps teens from jobs?

14 percent of county residents ages 19 to 21 aren't working or in school

By JENNIFER NEJMAN
Daily Record/Sunday News
Sunday, August 21, 2005

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On a sidewalk corner outside West Manchester Mall, a spot most people pass on their way someplace else, teenage friends share cigarettes and argue about whether Mountain Dew has a lot of calories.

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Jason Plotkin - YDR

They talk. Goof off. Wander inside to the arcade so a few can stomp on the Dance Dance Revolution arcade machine.

It's the summer routine, a reason not be at home with the parents, they say.

Later, some will go to work, another rite of passage for some teens.

Then, there are others, like 18-year-old Du'Rhian Johnson of York City, who had a temporary job he thought might become permanent but didn't. He has been looking for work for months.

From the left, Martin Baughman, 20, of Dover; Brandon Bedford, 15, of Shiloh; Raven Hausberger, 16, of Dover; and Nathan Platts, 18, of Shiloh, share some smokes outside West Manchester Mall. They say it's not too hard to find a job but usually it requires cleaning out a grease trap.

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Friday, he took a skill test to determine if he would qualify for a program to help him find work or training.

Some York County professionals who help young people say it's difficult these days for them to find jobs. Others believe there are plenty of entry-level positions — it's a matter of preparing young people and overcoming barriers.

A study published by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, a child advocacy group, found about 14 percent of people between the ages of 19 and 21 in York County are not working and not in school. Adding younger teens in the county to the group improved the number to about 9 percent of 16- to 21-year-olds in that position.

Joan Benso, the partnership's president and CEO, said the number of idle young people is cause for concern, especially the ones who are in the 19- to 21-year-old group not pursuing higher education.

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Jason Plotkin - YDR

"These are people who are trying to pay their own way, and the absence of work for them means that they are a drain on someone else's paycheck," she said.

Johnson graduated from Crispus Attucks YouthBuild Charter School. He lives with his mom but wants his own place.

"You really need a job around here to survive," he said. "If you don't have a job, the only thing you can do is sell drugs, and I'm not trying to go to jail."

Over the past seven, eight months, Johnson has put in about 15 to 20 applications at sneaker stores, restaurants and businesses. He's had interviews, but no job offers, he said. His friends found employment through people they knew who worked at different places.

The group of friends at West Manchester Mall said they believe jobs are out there for teens — it's a matter of

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Du'Rhian Johnson, 18, of York takes a test that measures his reading and math skills to see if he meets some of the qualifications that could enroll him in a program to further his job possibilities. Johnson said he has been looking for a job for several months.

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Platts ended up at a McDonald's in Dover.

Sixteen-year-old Raven Hausberger works there, too. She's saving money for college.

"I just kept on calling," she said. She would ask potential employers, "Have you checked my application yet? I want the job."

Why teens don't work

Some drop out of high school or college.

Some are caring for ill family members.

Others don't have a transportation.

Some are pregnant or parents themselves.

Some can't find a job.

Some aren't motivated.

"Young adults seem to have sporadic moments of motivation," said Doris Brown, special programs manager at the Crispus Attucks Center for Employment and Training.

On Friday shortly after 9 a.m., two young people had arrived for an assessment test. Four were missing. Some arrived late. Brown drove to homes and knocked on doors. She pulled one girl out of bed and brought her to the Loretta Claiborne Building.

She believes many of the teens and young adults she sees want to work or further their training but they need prodding.

The Crispus Attucks Center for Employment and Training has Youth Connections. The program has a relationship with the South Central Workforce Investment Board, which links individuals who are unemployed with work and training.

To qualify, generally young people must be between the ages of 14 and 21 and from low-income families. They also must have another barrier such as being a pregnant or parenting teen or having a reading and math deficiency, among others.

Brown said they are focusing on recruiting older teens and young adults.

Younger teens don't have much trouble finding employment as long as they are in school, said Gary Calhoun of the YWCA.

Without a diploma or GED, the chances of nabbing a job are slim, he said. Then, it becomes a matter of instilling a work ethic in them to finish school, he said.

Some young people are passed over because they don't know how to properly present themselves, said Deb Shifflet of the Southcentral Employment Corp. Their emails might be toohottohandle@hotmail.com, or their voice mails have rap music but not their names.

Other barriers include transportation. The bus system has made strides, but sometimes the commute to the city just isn't possible for an unemployed young person in Red Lion, Shifflet said.

Benso of the partnership believes America is squeezing its youngest workers out of jobs.

She points to grocery store checkout lines.

Who's bagging? she asks.

She sees more retirees and college-age people who haven't found employment in their field.

It's not that she believes these people shouldn't have jobs teens usually perform — it's just another barrier to teens who need that critical first job, she said.

motivation and willingness to clean grease traps and toilets.

"It was hard for me because I'm lazy," 18-year-old Nathan Platts said.

The West York Area High School student put in one application, at Claire's Boutique, a store that sells hair clips and purses. It seemed like a good way to meet chicks, he said.

Some teens don't have any barriers to taking a job. It just might be a family preference.

Sixteen-year-old Amanda Vivona of West York filled out applications for fast-food restaurants, but her parents wouldn't let her work.

"They think if I get a job I won't concentrate on school, which is really ridiculous," Amanda said. "I want to be able to have my own money."

Why some say teens need jobs

Teens want money.

Without a job, they might turn to illegal activities.

"It's that simple," said George Moore, executive director of the Community Progress Council in York.

Working can help teens develop what employers call "soft skills" — being on time, taking direction from bosses and wearing appropriate clothing.

Too many hours during the school year can negatively affect academics, but studies have shown that if teens work no more than 20 hours a week or during the summer, the group shows improved graduation rates and organizational skills, Benso said.

In the City of York, there aren't as many restaurants and stores, so if transportation is a problem, they might not be able to get a job, Moore said.

A local committee is working on an application to have the City of York designated as a federal weed-and-seed site. It already has such designation at the state level that brings in funds, Moore said. If the request for federal designation is approved, as part of a grant, the city could receive money to fund a summer work program for teens, bringing back a program it used to have.

Entry-level jobs are out there, he said.

Informally, council employees try to connect teens with private sector jobs by vouching for them with employers.

"Someone who is better-to-do knows someone, and that's how kids get jobs," Moore said. "Urban kids might not have that connection."

Michael Jefferson, director of employment and training at Crispus Attucks, said there are many variables, but locally people are willing to help young job seekers.

"This is probably the best time I've seen for 18 and up to find employment — if they have the right attitude, if they have some salable skill, if they can pass the drug test and if they have some means of transportation," he said.

Youth statistics

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children released a report on the state of youth employment as part of a series on youth in transition. The report defines young people as idle if they are not working and not in school.

For this report, the City of York and York County were lumped together as an urban area.

Between the ages of 19 and 21 in Pennsylvania:

One in five in an urban area is idle

One in seven in a rural area is idle

One in nine in a suburban area is idle

The report, released in the beginning of this month relied on 2000 U.S. Census data and Census Bureau Current Population Surveys from 1996 to 2004

Source: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

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Youth rally

A youth rally is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Aug. 27 in the 400 block of South Pine Street. The rally is being sponsored by Fairview Full Gospel Missionary Baptist Church 1,000 Black Men of York, Shiloh Baptist Church, Bible Tabernacle Church and other churches. The rally will feature a basketball tournament, games, food, music, employment and health information. It is free and open to young people. If employers want to attend to recruit

young people, they may call for information. Call Ulysee Washington, assistant pastor, at 292-6437.

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