



## TEEN WORKERS FACE DISMAL SUMMER JOB OUTLOOK

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*It's officially summer and for most teens that means no more school and lots of free time – for a job. But with a downward trend in teen-age employment there will be fewer of them scooping ice cream, mowing lawns, ripping movie tickets or babysitting children this summer.*

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the government agency that gathers information about employment, calculates youth summer employment at the end of the season, which runs from April to July. But economists at the agency speculate that fewer teens will be working this summer.

The April employment participation rate, those 16-to-24 year olds working or looking for work, was 59.3 percent, down from 64.2 percent in 2000, according to bureau economist Stephanie Boraas.

“It has been trending downward consistently. Fewer people in that age group are employed or looking for jobs. I can’t say why because there are so many factors that could effect that. But it’s been declining since 1997. There’s no reason to believe that trend will change,” said Boraas.

### **What impacts teen employment?**

The economic slowdown is one reason for this decline. Many lower-paying jobs in the service industries such as food service and retail are going to adult employees including out-of work professionals, seniors returning to work and recent college graduates.

“Teenagers are at the end of the hiring queue,” Andrew Sum, director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, told the Associated Press.

The center recently released a study which projected the teen employment rate, those teens who will find work this summer, at less than 37 percent, the lowest since 1948.

In addition, as the number of teens grows, by about 2 million in recent years according to Sum, the number of federal summer jobs programs for youth have been cut – from over 600,000 four years ago to less than 100,000 in the summer of 2003.

### **What employers think about teen workers**

Teen employment can also be impacted by employers’ perceptions that teens are not the most reliable workforce.

Brian Cote, a general manager at Hilltop Fun Center in Somersworth, N.H., told Foster's Sunday Citizen he's had trouble keeping employees.

"It's a good pool but a lack of work ethic. It's hard to keep teenagers staying focused," he said.

Renee Ward, founder of Teens4Hire.org, a national teen employment Web site, concurs but thinks the perceptions are not always fair or accurate.

"That's the perception, that teens are not mature enough, not prepared for the workplace, they have poor expectations. They want a paycheck but don't want to work for it. But that's not fair," Ward said. "They've got to start somewhere. I don't think the mindset exists to truly value the young worker."

### **Why and where teens work**

But when teens are working they say it's because it's a necessity.

According to a March 2004 Teens4Hire.org membership poll, 52 percent of the more than 3,000 responders said that working was not a luxury. Thirty percent of those polled said that the money was for helping family and 22 percent said wages were for college expenses.

"I take anywhere from 10 to 50 percent of each paycheck and put it aside for savings. It will pay for my college expenses," said Charlton Dobson, a New Hampshire teen who is working two part-time jobs and looking for a third for the summer.

And the majority of those teens who are working hold jobs in restaurants and retail stores. A Junior Achievement survey found that 26 percent of teens with jobs work in restaurants or fast food, another 26 percent in retail or sales, 11 percent in an office, 6.6 percent in lawn care, 6 percent in babysitting, 4.6 percent in lifeguarding or recreation and 1.7 percent in construction.

### **The importance of working early in life**

Research has shown that teens from all income brackets have increased wages and job stability if they have early work experience.

"They do better. They earn more. They're employed more stably," said Sum. "And they make more money until they're in their mid-20s. So there's a lot of advantages to having kids work when they're young."

To maximize their employment chances Teen4Hire.org recommends a list of the top ten tips to land a job. The tips include knowing your potential employer's expectations, getting good grades, being aggressive in your job hunt and learning to fill out an employment application.

*By Annie Schleicher, NewsHour Extra*

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