Teens Struggle to Find Work in Sour Economy
The Associated Press, 2009

Teenagers often look for a part-time job to pay for their cars and other items or to save for college. In today’s economy, however, teens may not be able to find work as easily as they have in the past. Read the article below to learn more about why teens are having a hard time finding work.

NEW YORK -- Like many recent high school grads, 18-year-old Nathan Wolford wants his own place and his own car, so he's doing what many parents would tell him to do: looking for a job.

But even for a teen who is willing to work almost anywhere enthusiastically, finding a job in these tough economic times isn't easy. Retailers and restaurants aren't hiring as much, and a rising unemployment rate means stiff competition from laid-off workers with more experience.

"I haven't had one phone call," said Wolford, of Blaine, Wash., who has applied to a dozen places, such as Ross Dress for Less, Best Buy and Joe's Sporting Goods. "Pretty much all the jobs I applied for, they aren't hiring."

With parents pinching pennies and college costs rising, more teens are expected to search for part-time and summer jobs this year.

"They may not have the allowance they are used to. They're going to be looking for ways to replace what was taken from them," said Karen S. Hinds, author of "A Teenager's Guide to the Workplace." "For some students, it might well be replacing an income in the family."
That would reverse a decades-long downward trend in teen employment since the 1980's. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2008, 32.6 percent of teens ages 16-19 were employed, a historic low, down from 45.2 percent in 2000.

Fewer teens have part-time jobs today because they stay in school longer, spend more time studying and have less free time, according to a report from market research firm Mintel. Baby boomer parents have told children their job is getting into college, so many teens haven’t felt compelled to work, said Susan Beacham, founder and CEO of Money Savvy Generation.

"We have given our children the No. 1 job of school because we have always been able to take care of college," she said. She thinks kids will be better off with work experience, but in today's economy, there's no guarantee they'll find a job if they want it.

Jordan Bonet, 17, of New York City, said he has been looking for a job for more than a year at stores such as Best Buy and Modell's Sporting Goods.

He wants to earn money so he can pay for clothes, games and eating out. He's also graduating and would like to get an apartment for the fall. Jordan said his dad is unemployed and his mom has taken a dock in pay.

"A lot of the places aren't willing to hire teens," he said. "It's more cost-efficient to hire someone who can work full-time."

The nation's unemployment rate reached 7.6 percent in January, according to the Labor Department. The teen unemployment rate held steady at 20.8 percent.

"For every teen that's applying, there could be 10 or 12 adults applying for that same job," said Nancy Robinson of Icon Culture, a cultural trend research firm.

Employers would rather hire experienced older workers if given a choice, said Andrew Sum, director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston. He said teens also face competition from illegal immigrants and the young college grad who is unable to find a job.

Davidda Battle, 17, of Philadelphia, said she has made no progress in her search for summer employment. She works for the Philadelphia Youth Network but is looking for a summer job to earn money for clothes and eating out.

She estimates that she has applied for 30 jobs -- grocery stores, drug stores, clothing stores. She even carries her resume with her.

Some of the stores were looking for managers, and she doesn't have that experience, "but most of the other jobs are like regular jobs that teenagers should be able to get," said Battle.

Sum said it's only going to get tougher. He would like to see more effort to help teenagers find work because they are more likely to stay in school, less likely to become pregnant and more likely to get a job once they graduate. Teens who
work are also paying taxes, which benefits the economy, he added.

"I think working is good because it sets you up right for your future," said David Ofshay, 17, of West Hartford, Conn. He works at a Bertucci's restaurant and is currently looking for another job to save for a car, insurance and money to have at college.

"It keeps you out of trouble. It gives you structure. It shows maturity."

It's the idea of freedom that keeps Wolford going. Except for a semester of college, he's lived with his parents "forever."

"Right now I just want to find a job that pays all right, so I can do my own thing," he said.

Demonstrate Understanding
1. There are a few teenagers mentioned in the article who have been looking for a job. Fill in the chart below with information about three of the teenagers in the article. Include details from the article.

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<th>Where teen lives</th>
<th>Why teen wants a job</th>
<th>A detail about the teen's job search</th>
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Demonstrate Understanding
2. How has the employment rate for teens changed from 2000 to 2008? Provide two reasons that this change may have occurred, according to the article.

Develop an Interpretation
3. If today's teenagers read this article before trying to find jobs, what would they learn? Provide at least two specific examples with details from the article to support your answer.
Develop an Interpretation
4. The article mentions several reasons why it is difficult for teens to find a job today. Which two reasons do you think are the most likely to keep a teen from getting a job and why?

Analyze Text
5. The author begins by introducing Nathan Wolford and ends the article with a quote by Nathan. Why do you think the author chose to do this? How does this technique help the reader?
6. The author includes quotes and information from many experts in the field of employment. Choose two quotes and explain why the author decided to include this expert information.

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