

Hub teens hope GOTCHA fair leads to work

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Photo by Nancy Lane

Justin Pomare arrived at the Dorchester job fair, with the kind of confidence that only youth, and a new interview outfit, can bring.

"I'd like to work with kids, and maybe doing something with sports," said the 16-year-old Pomare, who plans to give some of his earnings to his mom. The rest, he said, will pay for a laptop.

As Boston and the rest of the nation fights its way out of the Great Recession, adults with years of experience struggle to find paying jobs. The trickle-down effect means it's even harder for teens to find summer jobs. The nationwide teen jobless rate hit 26 percent in January, compared to 9.7 percent overall.

"It's tough," Daniel Gelbtuch said at yesterday's job fair at the Bird Street Community Center in Dorchester's Uphams Corner. "Teens' unemployment levels are at Depression-era levels."

Gelbtuch's organization, Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corp., is part of a bigger community group called GOTCHA, or Get Off The Corner Hanging Around. In addition to hosting the job fair, GOTCHA is calling on legislators to increase funding for two state programs that promote teen employment.

Last year, the cash-strapped state cut in half its support for an \$8 million jobs program for Boston teens. The statewide program gave the city enough money to hire 4,000 teens and pay them \$8.25 an hour for several 25-hour weeks.

The state also cut by half a similar program that spent \$4 million on career counselors who worked in urban high schools, connecting students with jobs at companies.

Yesterday, as Pomare and his sister Jordan, 14, learned about The Food Project, an urban gardening initiative that plans to hire 90 Boston teens for the summer, Jessica Gomes of Dorchester was talking to people from the Boston Children's Museum, the Salvation Army and other groups about summer jobs that would allow her to work with kids.

Meanwhile GOTCHA volunteer Troy Brandon, a senior at West Roxbury High School, was asking other job seekers to send postcards urging more support for teen job programs to their senators and representatives.

"I want jobs in my community to flourish," Brandon said.

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