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## Job search is frustrating teens

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### Downturn hurts chances for many

By Meghan Irons, Globe Staff | July 6, 2009

Teens in the city's low-income families long for summer - but not to laze about on the beach or take trips to far-off destinations. When July comes, they want a job.

This is supposed to be a good year for them. Boston has \$8 million in the kitty, thanks to an infusion of \$1.3 million in federal stimulus money. That means 1,200 more people ages 14 to 24 will be hired this summer. But there are still more applicants than jobs.

The obstacles are greater this summer, with the number of jobs overall dwindling and unemployment numbers rising. Because of this, advocates say, thousands of teens have struggled to find work.

Here are some of their stories.

#### Jonathan Carvalho

In the past few months, Jonathan Carvalho has applied at two Walgreens stores, two CVS stores, a Stop & Shop, a Best Buy, and a handful of clothing and food stores.

The 18-year-old Dorchester resident leaned on his friends and his parents - both former managers at retail stores - to get interviews, and filled out applications online.

Still, he can't find work.

This is new for Carvalho. Last summer he had no trouble finding a job "cleaning up and helping out" at an office in Roxbury.

"There are no jobs for anybody that doesn't have a college degree or anybody in their teens," he said. "Most stores, they say they have jobs, but they don't want to give jobs to that group - the people who don't have a college degree."

Carvalho's job troubles began months before he graduated from Wakefield High School. He asked a friend to help him get hired at the Stop & Shop in his neighborhood. Carvalho got a meeting with the store's manager, but no job.

He has enrolled at Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Boston, which is near the Cambridgeside Galleria. He tried to find work in the mall. But he's had no luck.

"I feel frustrated," he said. "People don't believe that we want jobs. They think we want to hang on the streets. But that's not it. We would rather have jobs than hang on the streets."

#### Alexis Martin

Alexis Martin, 16, said she used to be "really, really bad" - drinking, running away from home, and staying out all hours.

Last year, she said, she got out of a program for troubled juveniles and then got a job. It straightened her out.

"It's kind of something to keep me out of trouble, to keep me on task and not forgetting who I actually am," said Martin.

"Now I'm getting good grades," she said. "I work. I don't hang around anybody anymore."

Trying to find work, the wait, the worry - it comes with the territory, Martin said.

"I'm used to signing up and stuff like that," said Martin, who is getting help from Action for Boston Community Development Inc., which places low-income youths in jobs. "I'm kind of immune to it."

Martin said working gives her independence and purpose, and relieves the burden on her grandmother, who is her primary caretaker.

Under income guidelines for a child to qualify for ABCD's job program, a family of four must earn \$28,605 or less.

Martin has applied for three jobs, including at the South Boston Action Center, where she works during the school year. She's confident she'll work again this summer. "I will," she said, with gusto. "I always do."

### **Martin Oliver**

There was a tinge of excitement in Martin Oliver's voice.

At last, he landed a job interview. He was sure it was a done deal: "I've got a job," he said.

But he would still have to compete with thousands of other young people vying for work this summer.

The 18-year-old from Dorchester has been looking for summer work for a few months. "I don't know what the problem was," he said. "They just haven't been calling me back."

For the past two years, Oliver has worked at the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, his wages paid by the Boston Youth Fund, which finds jobs for 15- to 17-year-olds.

But then he turned 18, and the jobs stopped. "I aged out," he said.

He has since applied to a few places. Only one - the Design Studio for Social Innovation in Chinatown - called him back.

"I'm going to college next year, and I'd rather have some money in my pocket," said Oliver, who plans to attend Wentworth Institute of Technology in the fall. "That is why it's such a big thing to get a job, so I can have some money when I get to college."

On interview day, he arrived early at Ruggles Station to make the 1 p.m. appointment. "The hardest part about finding summer jobs," he said, "is finding people that are just hiring."

After months of trying, Martin finally got the job.

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