

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

January 27, 2016

Mitchell: Job creation should start at home

By Mary Mitchell

It has always been tough for teens to find a job.

But these days, finding youth employment opportunities in the Chicago area is nearly impossible, according to a [study by the University of Illinois at Chicago](#).

In 2014, for 16- to 19-year-olds, only 12.4 percent of blacks, 15 percent of Hispanics or Latinos, and 24.4 percent of whites were employed, according to the study.

Almost half of black men in Chicago between 20 and 24 are neither working nor in school, researchers found.

The study, produced for the Alternative Schools Network, was released this week by a coalition that included the Chicago Urban League, Westside Health Authority, Youth Connection Charter School, Chicago Area Project and Black United Fund of Illinois.

The organizations proposed there be a national commitment to employ 2 million jobless youth across the country, both during the summer and year-round at a cost of \$4.5 billion.

“We are losing a generation of youth who have no opportunity to work in their neighborhoods,” the activists stated in a press release.

I landed my first job at 12 years old as a babysitter for my father’s employer — after I had been turned away from every store in my neighborhood.

When I went to a vocational high school, having employment was part of the education experience.

Let’s see, I was a part-time keypunch operator for a small spice company. That prepared me for the night shift at the Spiegel Catalog facility on the Southwest Side.

Today’s high rate of youth unemployment exacerbates an existing challenge for young men.

In “Street God,” the autobiography of Dimas



Finding youth employment opportunities in the Chicago area is nearly impossible, according to a study by the University of Illinois at Chicago. | Sun-Times file photo

Salaberrios, the former drug boss who now leads a thriving ministry in South Bronx explains the tug of fast money.

“My parents were always telling me, ‘If you work hard, you can do things and buy things when you get older.’ But I saw kids not much older than I buying nice things whenever they wanted them. To have that kind of power . . . the idea boggled my young brain,” he said.

It is particularly disheartening that Chicago had the highest percentage of black 16- to 19-year-olds (14.3 percent) who were out of work and out of school in 2014.

There’s just no getting around the barrier a lack of education presents.

These alarming jobless statistics could also explain why there is so much violence in black and brown communities.

Still, it is unlikely the private sector is going to rain down jobs on the West and South Sides or that a state government drowning in debt is going to launch a massive job training and employment operation.

In the past, unemployed teenagers went door

to door with a rake and lawn mower looking to earn some bucks. College-bound seniors sold snow cones on front porches in the summer and shoveled snow in the winter.

Instead of waiting for someone to hand them a job, these youngsters understood it was on them to make a way.

That hasn’t changed.

But what would your reaction be if a teen knocked on your door today offering to provide a service for a fee? It should be welcoming.

It is going to take more than the on-again, off-again job programs government sponsors to solve this crisis.

We need to reiterate the value of creative work.

[Click for Full Report, Lost: The Crisis Of Jobless and Out Of School Teens and Young Adults In Chicago, Illinois and the U.S.](#)