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Hire-A-Youth

### It makes a difference

To some students, Hire-A-Youth is just another summer job. To some students, it is all about trying something different. To other students, it is all about making money to buy new clothes, the latest cell phones, gadgets and gizmos. To me, the Hire-A-Youth program is the relief to my family's pain. This program has helped change my life. It has drastically changed my circumstances.

Without Hire-a-youth, I wouldn't have a job. There use to be a fine line that separated adult jobs from youth jobs; but over the last few years that line has dwindled and perished. It feels as if finding a job is equivalent to finding a needle in a haystack. Everyone, from fifty year olds to fifteen year olds, is fighting for that one little McDonald job because what may seem like an insignificant McDonald job can mean the difference between your family eating and starving.

In this current economy, people have lost numerous things. Some have lost cars, savings, and many have lost their homes. But I've never really had a home to lose. I hear a lot of people saying "I have no where to go," but that's absurd. Many can simply just go over a relative's house or a friend's. Maybe even a teen shelter or a family shelter, but that's still somewhere to go. They might not be wiling to go there, but they still have somewhere to be. But when I say, with a quiver in my voice, that my mother, sister, and I had no place to go, that is exactly what I

mean. Think about this for a minute, where would you go when your grandmother closed the door on you, laughed, and then said that being homeless is what you get? Where could you go when homeless organizations claim to place you in a motel for a month, and without even notifying your family, run out of funds your first week there? When you come to them with your face drenched in tears, and they basically tell you good luck? Where would you sleep at night when your first cousin, whose living room is where you slept, moved out on you in your sleep, and left you there? Where would you wake up when shelters toss you back into the streets when your time is up? When shelters are too full to accept you or the only way to take you would be to split up the only thing you ever had...your family? Where would you go when "friends" turn a blind eye to your struggle? Where could you go? That was my question. Where could my family go?

My mother was doing her best but couldn't possibly do it on her own; and that extra help she needed just wasn't there. What happens when a job doesn't pay enough and you need to buy food? Hunger happens. Food stamps helped, until they closed our account. This was me. This was my reality. My sister and I would eat at school and we would bring the scraps we managed to save back to our house of a car so my mother could eat. This is how it went for a long time until one day I stumbled across a piece of paper that read "The Hire-A-Youth Program." To me, that paper read hope. It meant food. It meant sleeping at a motel at night. It meant a lot more than what it actually read.

Now let us Fast-forward past the certification process and the work readiness training to when I received my first paycheck. If you were to look into my eyes on that day, you would have sworn I was Bill Gates. Two-hundred and seventy-nine dollars plus fifty-four cents was billions to me. That week I purchased food and toiletries. I bought gas for the car so my mother could get

to work, did the laundry, and purchased other necessities which allowed me the chance to step up and become the man of the family who could now be depended on.

The Hire-a-Youth program has allowed me to provide for my family, gave me more work experience and has helped change my family's residential status. Due to the generous pay rate at Hire-A-Youth, I was able to help pay the rent and deposit which allowed my family to move into our very own apartment and fill it with food. Our days of struggling with homelessness are over.

The Hire-a-Youth program helped change my life and life changing events will never be forgotten. I want to thank the entire HAY program for giving me this life changing opportunity and especially my case manager Ms. Tara Anderson for being so flexible and understanding. I deeply express my gratitude to the HAY program because it has made a tremendous difference in my life.