

Hope for young jobless

Experts advise unemployed youths to be persistent

BY THERESE AAKER
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SAN BERNARDINO •

Candice Federick, 23, grew up in foster care dealing with homelessness and abuse. During high school, she became pregnant and chose to leave her abusive boyfriend, raising her child on her own. Federick needed to find a job fast, and she couldn't afford to attend school to pursue a nursing career.



Candice Federick

"I was looking for a job, didn't have work experience and I didn't have any training," said Federick, a Victorville resident.

Finding a job can be tough for anyone, but it can be exceptionally challenging for youths of the High Desert — especially for those who have struggled in ways Federick has.

According to the latest statistics from the state, the overall unemployment rate in San Bernardino County is 9.3 percent. But the jobless rate for people between the ages of 16 and 24 is roughly three times that, according to

Emily Petrus, staff analyst for the San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board.

Many jobs that ordinarily went to younger hires several years ago are now being taken by older people with more experience.

"For young people and adults, many of them are displaced because so many people with more experience and qualifications are getting jobs," said Ronald Wilson, chief operating officer of ICR Staffing in Victorville. "That's true across the nation, not just here. Positions with more experience are higher in demand. It used to be 'I'll take anybody I can get' but today they don't need to settle. There are plenty of applicants. Some places have 1,200 applications for a job that pays \$10."

Wilson said the lack of experience is a huge factor in these demographics and persistence is necessary to find a job. It's difficult, he said, but not impossible.

Petrus said if young people are motivated and prepared, there's lots of employment.

"For high school students, it's important to remember that they have skills and experience, they just don't know it," Petrus said.

Students should show they have leadership

skills and a good work ethic through extracurricular activities and volunteering and should explain that experience to employers, she said.

"College students might have the advantage because there are not so many restrictions on what they can do and they can adjust their schedule for employers," Petrus said. "It shows they can work to pursue a career and are able to show an employer they have work experience."

Petrus added that at interviews, appropriate dress is important, as is a positive attitude. Calling employers to follow up is also extremely important because it shows employers persistence.

"Employers see that," she said. "Employers tell us if they see those qualities, they are willing to train them for the position."

Wilson also said filling out applications carefully is important, as employers will toss one out for the slightest misspelling.

"Accuracy is really important," Wilson said. "Present yourself as well as you can by the venue they provide. And be tenacious. If they say you can re-apply in 90 days, you better mark your calendar."

Federick's luck changed when she attended a job fair where she met a member of



Goodwill Industries, a youth provider for the Workforce Investment Act Youth Program. Soon after, she got a job as an administrative assistant.

The two-year program works with young people ages 17 to 21 years old. The first year of the program focuses on occupational learning and the second year on follow-up management.

The program has 145 participating young adults and teens in the High Desert, partnering with the Apple Valley Unified School District, Hesperia Unified School District, Career Institution and Goodwill of Victor Valley.

Petrus is a passionate believer of the program and sees that it's changing lives, especially for others who struggled like Federick.

Federick was recognized as graduate of the year at Goodwill High School, and she's the youth program's success story. She also spoke at a job fair event attended by more than 400 young people, according to Petrus.

"What we do is change people's lives. We help them support their families and have a better life," Petrus said. "I know how hard it is for young people up here. ... Their parents didn't provide them the help they needed, so we give them skills to succeed."

The program helps participants attain certifications or diplomas and also aids in resume building, transportation to school, portfolios and books.

Federick became a certified nursing assistant and works with the elderly in Victorville.

"I plan to get a bachelor's degree and go into social work because I like helping people," Federick said. "I enjoy putting smiles on others' faces. I know that doing the job right makes a difference."

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**Ronald Wilson,
ICR Staffing**