

Program gives youth employment experience

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You never forget your first summer job.

Maybe you got a sore back and aching forearms from scooping cones for a never-ceasing lineup of locals and tourists clamouring for their ice cream fix. Whether you mowed lawns or flipped burgers, working alongside people you liked or loathed, that first foray into the paid working world was an important first step.

On Wednesday, 256 youth aged 15 to 18 will gather at the Jim Durrell Centre to mark the successful completion of their first summer jobs as they graduate from the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa's summer youth employment program. Funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the program places local youth from lower-income neighbourhoods into their first paid jobs.

"It's giving people the experience they need that they might not have a chance to get on their own," said Steven Boucher, project leader at YSB. "It's eliminating all the stigma on their address, on their postal code and giving them a real chance."

In the past six years, more than 1,700 youth have been matched with their first summer jobs through the program.

Beginning in July, about 280 youth received 20 hours of pre-employment training including customer service skills, health and safety training and writing resumes and cover letters. They also emphasize budgeting so youth have some money left at the end of the summer.

"It's their first job so we let them know that it's important to save money for their future," Boucher said. "The young man that still stands out to this day bought a washer and a dryer for his mom."

They earn minimum wage, working on average 20 to 30 hours a week in fields including recreation, business and youth leadership. Once the six week placement is up, employers have the option of keeping them on, which some do.

"It keeps them off the streets," Boucher said. "The youth are actually working within their communities to make it a better community."

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