

## Cupcakes and Cattle Breeding: Teens Turn to Summer Start-Ups

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By SUE SHELLNBARGER – The Wall Street Journal

Lexie Oliver, 16, has been trying for weeks to get a summer job, to earn spending money and to feel productive. But the search has proven "really difficult," says the Gainesville, Fla., high-school sophomore.

After applying at numerous retailers and getting turned down, Ms. Oliver has made a decision: If she wants a job this summer, she figures she'll have to create her own. She's already working on starting a handmade jewelry business, finding materials, tapping a friend to build a Web site and asking relatives for help marketing her wares.

Faced with the darkest summer-job market since the government began collecting data after World War II, a growing number of teens are turning to entrepreneurship. The government's \$1.2 billion youth jobs program is expected to make barely a dent in overall teen joblessness this summer. Employment among 16- to 19-year-olds is still likely to sink to a new low of 31% or 32% this summer, down from a previous nadir of 32.7% in 2008, says Andrew Sum, director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston.

Thus "for many kids, starting a business may be the only option if they want to make some money," says Jack Kosakowski, president of Junior Achievement in the U.S., part of JA Worldwide, Colorado Springs, Colo., which runs youth programs on work-force readiness and financial literacy through 585 offices in 124 countries.

Amid rising interest, enrollment in a Boston camp run by the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship doubled this spring. Junior Achievement entrepreneurship programs in Texas and California report a 30% increase in inquiries. And at CampCEO, an entrepreneurship-training program at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, inquiries are running 30% ahead of a year ago, compared with a national pattern of flat enrollment in youth camps in general.

Of course, teen entrepreneurs face tall hurdles. Most need at least a little start-up money, for materials, flyers or tools. Running a business can crowd out other pursuits, such as sports and clubs. And teens aren't immune to the sour economy. Angie Ocampo, 15, of White Plains, N.Y., had high hopes for the Spanish-language tutoring business she had been planning to pursue through this summer. But so far, "I haven't gotten too many regular customers" because families are cutting costs, she says.

Others are finding a niche. Aaron Hunt, 16, Salt Lake City, has decided his job this summer will be selling his Web-page designs online. After creating designs for friends and studying related subjects in high school, Aaron recently sold a Web logo to a client for \$60. Now, armed with a portfolio of colorful designs, he's ready to expand.

And Marlo Adelle Greta, 17, will be running GirlyWhirls.com, a barrette-making business, from her Austin, Texas, home. She regards starting a business as "a lot easier than having to go find a job," she says. "I make my own decisions, and the harder I work, the more money I can make. That's a cool thought -- it's all up to me."

A growing number of parents share that view. "Adults used to want their kids to go to work for big companies with 401(k)s and benefits," says Brad Hancock, director of the Neeley Entrepreneurship Center at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. "Now parents are saying, 'I'm not sure I want my child to walk that path. I want my child to be in charge of his or her own destiny.' "

At best, teens can be richly rewarded. Steven Crandall, an 18-year-old high-school senior in Grapevine, Texas, started a lawn-mowing business with his younger brother three years ago by offering to tend three neighbors' lawns. Today, the Crandall boys have expanded to 35 clients. Steven is even creating jobs for his friends; he has signed on six of his buddies at \$15 an hour to help out and another six have applied. "One of the coolest things" about being an entrepreneur, Steven says, "is the satisfaction of being able to help out so many guys who do need money." The business earned Steven \$14,000 last year, enabling him to make payments to his parents for the used truck they bought for him, "spoil my girlfriend, and tithe to my church," he says. The downside: It has crowded out other activities, including wrestling and basketball.

For teens considering start-ups, and for their parents, adolescent entrepreneurs offer some tips:

- Find and fill an unmet need. For example, the skills many teens use every day can be marketable. On Elance.com, a Web site where freelancers' services are bought and sold, demand among business clients for help establishing a presence on Facebook or Twitter is rising fast, a spokeswoman says. The site requires providers to be at least 18 years old.
- Look for a low-cost niche. After a vendor knocked at Loree Greta's door last summer in Austin, Texas, offering to clean her windows for \$150, she suggested her 14-year-old son, Max (the brother of jewelry maker Marlo Adelle), make the rounds offering to do the same for one-third as much. Brandishing a long-handled squeegee, vinegar, buckets and newspaper, Max earned about \$300 washing windows.
- Find something you love. Jessica Cervantes, a Miami 18-year-old who loves to bake, grew tired of cleaning up cupcake messes and smeary frosting spots after birthday parties for her young cousins. So she cooked up a fancy cupcake on an edible cookie stick and is now selling "Popsy Cakes" for \$30 a dozen. Although it's tough cramming in baking and delivering orders with her homework, she made \$6,000 last year for her college fund.
- Don't be discouraged by your age, says Anshul Samar, 15, of Cupertino, Calif., who is marketing "Elementeo," a chemistry game he created, on Amazon.com. "Your age can even be an advantage," allowing a little risk-taking "without worrying about who's going to put the dinner on the table." And many adults are glad to lend a helping hand to enterprising teens, he says.
- Expect setbacks. During Ms. Cervantes's first few tries at making Popsy Cakes, "no one wanted to eat them," she says. Mr. Hunt, the Web designer, says he tried at first to design an online game but failed. Even if you fail, he advises, "Go for it. Don't stop, because you will get somewhere if you try hard enough."

One of the most common pitfalls faced by entrepreneurial teens, says Junior Achievement's Mr. Kosakowski, is parents. Instead of providing encouragement, he says, many say, "Why do you want to take that risk? Go work for somebody else." In fact, there's no better time than adolescence to try out ideas, while children have the freedom to fail without overwhelming consequences.

GirlyWhirls.com was born when Ms. Greta, Marlo Adelle's mother, picked up on a remark her daughter made while they were shopping together. Eyeing some barrettes, Marlo said, "I can make that at home," Loree says. "So she did." With Loree providing feathers, shells, beads and felt, the barrettes began selling well in several boutiques. Today, GirlyWhirls.com employs four occasional part-time "hairclip helpers" and pays Marlo about \$200 to \$300 a month after expenses. Marlo says she wants to continue the business through college, where she will probably major in design; her mother's encouragement, she adds, has made all the difference.

#### **Directions:**

1. **Show evidence of a close reading: highlight areas of confusion, write comments/thoughts in the margin, define vocabulary, etc.**
2. **Write a one-page reflection in your Writer's Notebook. Possible topics:**
  - **What are the obstacles, advantages, and disadvantages faced by teen entrepreneurs?**
  - **Do you plan to work during the summer? Do you have a job lined up?**
  - **Would you consider starting your own business? Why/Why not?**
  - **How could you apply your skills, knowledge, and abilities to provide a service or product that people want and would be willing to pay for?**