

## TEEN EMPLOYMENT PLANS



There are many people in the Tennessee area who believe in their youth and their ability to do positive things. The Jackson Gang Prevention Task Force is composed of a group of members who share this belief and want to find a way to prevent teens from joining gangs and help them to receive employment to literally keep them off the streets. The task force has a teen employment sub-committee, composed of individuals who want to create a plan that will help prevent teenagers from becoming involved in gang activity. The committee is hoping to help residents of the city between the ages of 15 and 21 find employment and the resources they need to find a job, along with learning the skills they need to have for specific jobs. The members of this subcommittee have designed a possible plan for their employment venture that would help youth who are at risk for joining gangs and getting into trouble, especially during the summer months and possibly during the school months as well. During a task force meeting, many of the members figured out that poverty is one of the main reasons why teenagers and young adults are joining gangs and becoming a part of gang recruitment. Supplying these teens and young adults with jobs could keep them off the streets and prevent them from getting involved in such dangerous situations. The law enforcement officials have made it clear that in order to prevent these at-risk teens and young adults from getting involved with gangs; they would need to find employment options before these individuals were entered in the juvenile delinquent system. Amy Jones, the director of the Juvenile Court Services, has said, "Everything gets harder once you get a juvenile record." The task force members have actually been discussing a number of possibilities, including a summer employment program which would be targeted toward students who are definitely under the poverty line, including families of at least four that are earning \$21,000 or less each year. Aside from targeting students, the task force will need to find a number of funding options for the program. The chairwoman for the task force, Vicki Lake, has asked that the members who are representing specific organizations work hard to get as many possible resources as they can. The plan that the members have been discussing will cost about \$100,000 just to employ 50 individuals for about 32 hours each week. While this seems like progress, the task force would really like to reach more individuals and increase the number of individuals that they would be able to employ. Lake is hopeful that the task force will receive the funding it needs to go through with this plans. She has said, "We're going to have to sell this."

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