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They work hard for the money

After their exams are over, some students get a taste of the working life.

SEOW KAI LUN

Victor Peh spent his childhood years pestering his parents to take him to the Singapore Zoo - he always dreamt of working with animals.

By the time he was seven, he had convinced his parents to make fortnightly family outings there. But it was not until he finished his O-level examinations that he got to go there every day.

The Evergreen Secondary student applied for a job as a crowd controller at the Night Safari.

He is among the many teenagers who are making the best of their two-month break - the first longer holiday because of the new single intake for junior college - by getting jobs before they go back to school.

IN spoke to 100 students working during the break, who gave several reasons for it: they did not want to get bored; they wanted experience in industries they were aiming for when they finished school; and yes, they wanted to make money.

A graduate of the Singapore Sports School, Noreen Herman, 16, said her parents wanted her "to be productive and not spend the entire holiday at home slacking".

"Plus it doesn't hurt to earn some money," she added.

Most entry-level jobs teens get in the retail and service lines pay between \$5 and \$6 an hour.

Victor, for one, gets what the zoo's managers call a "competitive wage" (or about \$6 an hour on weekdays and \$6.50 an hour at weekends). His responsibilities are to operate the photography booth, make sure people find seats at the popular Creatures Of The Night show and, yes, he also gets training on how to handle the show's animals.

"Every day, I look forward to working because I'm surrounded by animals - what I always wanted," he said. "This job is the first step."

If he gets a place at a junior college, he will be back at school in a week's time, but he is already planning to work at the zoo for another temporary job at his next break at the end of the year.

WHAT WORKING STUDENTS SAY

I did not think that being a waitress would be as hard as it is. I had to memorise the entire menu and learn a lot of restaurant etiquette. I have new respect for all service staff."
 - *Tan Jia Min, 16, service crew member at Sakae Sushi restaurant*

"After working, I am more certain than ever that I want to be doing this in the future."
 - *Chong Yu Lun, 16, videographer with blueprintstudios*

"Now that I know what it is like to work, I cannot wait to get back to school. School is easier than working."
 - *Gwendolyn Tan, 16, data entry assistant at LocalGlobal, a logistics company*

"I've learnt a lot at my job, especially how to manage and interact with people."
 - *Ng Hui Shan, 16, operations assistant at Singapore Zoo*

I used to buy whatever I wanted. But now after earning my own money, I am more careful about how I spend it."
 - *Pitrie Neo, 16, retail assistant at FairPrice*

VACATION JOBS APLENTY

Because their break coincides happily with the annual festive season - Christmas through Chinese New Year - teens are a welcome force for retail and service providers looking for entry-level staff.

In fact, teens told IN they were all offered jobs within one or two weeks of applying.

Just days after Ronald Ho completed his last O-level paper last November, he managed to lock in a gig as a banquet waiter. The 16-year-old graduate from Orchid Park Secondary gets paid \$6 an hour.

"I am working to save up money for my education, so I can lessen the burden on my parents," he said.

Work, however, can be tough, as many are finding out.

But, motivated by her dreams to open her own restaurant one day, Chua Xin Li puts up with long hours as an assistant in an apple strudel shop, where she is learning the ropes.

"I get to interact with customers and get a better understanding of how to run a food business," said the 17-year-old MacPherson Secondary School graduate.

As the teens enter the working world, they develop an appreciation for what their parents do.

Said Nicole Chua, 17, a graduate from Bukit Batok Secondary School: "I now know how difficult it is to earn money and will not take what I have for granted."

TIPS TO CLINCH A VACATION JOB

1. Dress appropriately for interviews. While most vacation jobs are in a casual setting, wearing shorts and flip-flops will not make a good impression on hiring managers. If you want them to take you seriously, be well-groomed and presentable.
2. Have a resume, to make it easier for employers to know you. Include your past work experience, course of study, achievements and other activities, such as volunteer work.
3. Use different means to hunt for jobs. Register with a recruitment firm or look through the newspapers and on the Internet. Ask your friends and relatives too if they know companies that are hiring.
4. Research the company you are applying to. This will show that you are well-informed and have knowledge of what the job requires.
5. Consult your school counsellor, if there is one, for career guidance. He can help you decide what jobs would be suitable for you.

Source: *The Global Manpower Professionals (GMP) group*