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# 'Uniform jobs' aren't cool with teens

BY ROGER VARLEY  
 Staff Writer

Fast-food restaurants such as McDonald's and Wendy's are losing favour with today's youth for after-school employment because they just aren't "cool."

One of the main reasons is the uniforms.

"It's not like you're wearing cool clothes," said Hyun Joo Kim, 17, of Richmond Hill High School, who recently stopped working at one of the major hamburger chains. "It's like they want to embarrass us."

"Everyone makes fun of us," said fellow student 17-year-old Judy Ahn, another former fast-food employee.

Elod Nagy, 18, also of Richmond Hill high, agreed. He has been working at a fast-food outlet for five months.

"It never stops," he said of the teasing from schoolmates. "The uniforms are pretty crappy."

Christine Newland, 18, of Markham High School, is another who hates her uniform.

"It's tacky," she said of her coffee shop outfit. "It's not one of the places you choose to work. But it's a job."

However, a spokesperson for Wendy's Restaurants of Canada said she was not aware of any reluctance by teens to work for

the company.

"We're not finding any challenges with teens," said Sharon Reid.

She said it might seem as though fewer teens are working at fast-food restaurants because of the school season.

"You see more in the summer than at this time of year," she said.

McDonald's Restaurants of Canada was of the same opinion.

"I doubt there's much of a decline in the employment of young people," said a media communications employee who preferred not to be named. "If you walk into any of our stores, you'll see lots of young people."

Wal-Mart also makes the students' "uncool" list.

"Kids who work at Wal-Mart don't want to tell anyone," said Shannon Walter, 18, of Markham. "When you get paid a lot of money you're okay, but there's a lot of peer pressure not to work at creepy jobs with minimum wage."

Craig Legere, 18, another Markham high student, said he has been lucky with his after-school jobs. He works at a golf store, where he earns good money.

"I just lucked out," he said, noting that his sister works long hours at Shoppers Drug Mart.

Ahn said the main reason she quit her job was because the hours were impacting on her studies.

"I was working from 5 p.m. until 1 a.m., and sometimes 2:30 a.m.," she said.

Hours aren't a problem for Nagy.

"McDonald's is pretty much the last resort for a job," he said. "But I work there because they give me the hours I want. They're flexible."

For Nagy, the money he earns is "just enough", but Kim and Ahn claimed they were dissatisfied with what they had earned.

"The pay was different between 17-year-olds and 18-year-olds," said Kim. "They took advantage of us because we were younger."

The youths agreed the favoured after-school jobs are at what they called high-class restaurants and clothing stores.

"Especially stores that sell brand-name labels that people want to wear," said Kim.

Walter, who used to work at a fashion store and for the Town of Markham and now tutors other students, plans to apply for a job at The Gap — (The Gap is cool) — now that the exam period is over and she has a lighter school load.

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