**Article of the Week #13 Week of 2/9-2/13**

**Summer Jobs Program Leads to Less Violent Teen Crime, a Study Says**

**By The Philadelphia Inquirer, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.21.14**

More jobs for teens may lead to less violent crime, according to a recent study of a summer jobs program conducted by a University of Pennsylvania researcher. The decrease in the number of violent crimes was not only because working teenagers are too busy to get into trouble. Even 13 months after the jobs ended, the teens who participated in the study were arrested for fewer violent crimes than other youths. Teens selected for the study were chosen randomly and each worked for eight weeks. The employed teens were arrested for violent offenses 43 percent fewer times than their non-working peers.

**Soft Skills Matter**

The findings by Sara B. Heller, a professor of criminology at the University of Pennsylvania, were published last week in the journal Science. The teenagers participating in the study were generally from lower-income families and one- fifth of them had previously been arrested. The research was conducted in Chicago with the support of the city's government. Heller, who led the research, said it was not immediately clear why the summer jobs seemed to have a lingering positive impact on the participants after it concluded in the summer of 2012. One reason may be that the teenagers learned "soft skills" on the job, such as conflict resolution and self-control. Each youth was paired with an adult mentor who may have helped teach the skills. Heller called the results from the study "surprising and really exciting." “We don’t have a lot of success stories for reducing violence among disadvantaged youths,” she said.

**Study's Findings Are Promising**

There is minimal evidence from other studies that teen job programs can decrease crime rates, according to Dan Bloom. He is a director for a New York based nonprofit research group called MDRC, which aims to solve problems related to poverty. While a few programs have been found to lower crime rates, they all put the kids in housing programs and were costly, he said. The Chicago program was called One Summer Plus and cost less than $3,000 per youth. Of that amount, about half went toward paying the participant's wages. The teens were paid $8.25 an hour, the minimum wage in Illinois, for 25 hours of work per week. The rest of the budget went toward paying the mentors and for the administrative costs of running the program. “You just don’t expect for a short-term, relatively low-cost program to have such enduring effects,” said Evelyn Diaz, commissioner of Chicago's Department of Family and Support Services, which oversaw the project. Bloom was not involved with the One Summer Plus research, but said Heller's study was designed well and its findings are promising. He also believes that Chicago's mayor, Rahm Emanuel, deserves credit for being willing to see if a program like this could be effective in the city. Heller, the study's author, said the same. “There are some policymakers who are afraid of finding out if programs they like don’t work,” Heller said.

**What About Long-Term Effects?**

The study followed 730 teens who were picked at random from among 1,634 applicants. While the selected teens were employed, the rate of arrests for violent crimes was slightly lower in that group than among the remaining 904 teenagers. It was not until after the jobs were over that the biggest differences in arrest rates emerged, however.

Sixteen months after the program started, there were about five arrests for violent crimes per 100 youths who were offered jobs. The rate was much higher for teens not in the study, at nine violent-crime arrests per 100 youths. Heller said it was too soon to know for sure whether the benefits of the program outweigh the costs. Researchers still need to collect information on the long-term effects the program has on employment. Still, Heller said there is evidence that the program could have other important benefits, like reduced costs to the justice system and less suffering by victims.

The jobs program did not appear to reduce the rate of nonviolent crimes. Heller said the jobs that teens held taught them soft skills, like those necessary to resolve conflict. Yet, since nonviolent crimes do not involve conflict, the skills they learned in the program might not have been as useful in preventing nonviolent crime.

**"We Don't Give Up On Any Child"**

Teens in the study held a variety of jobs, including serving as a day-camp counselor, cleaning vacant lots, planting community gardens, and performing office work for nonprofit groups and government offices. Some of the responsibilities teens had during office jobs were tedious tasks, like paper shredding. “We explained that everybody’s first job is a horrible job,” Diaz said. “You’ve got to do some of that.” The program assigned one mentor to every 10 teenagers. The adults were available to give advice at all times of the day. The mentors played an important role in the program and some went beyond the call of duty, Diaz said. When one teen got in trouble with the law and had to go to court, the mentor even went to court too and appeared before the judge. The mentor defended the teenager and told the judge that the teen should stay on probation instead of going to a detention center. The One Summer Plus study took place with the belief that it's not too late to make a difference in a teenager's life. “Lots of people will write off teenagers, especially if they’ve already gotten in trouble with the law,” Diaz said. “We don’t give up on any child.”